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RECONSIDERING OTHERNESS IN THE SHADOW OF THE HOLOCAUST:
SOME PROPOSALS FOR POST-HOLOCAUST ECCLESIOLOGY

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The thesis has been composed by the candidate and is the candidate's own work.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation combines a sustained reflection on the European and North American Post-Holocaust theological landscape with the themes of otherness, exclusion, and identity. The study aims to offer a constructive contribution toward ecclesiology in a post-Holocaust world riven with a rejection of otherness. The consensus among Holocaust scholars is that the moral failure of the churches to engage on behalf of the vast majority of victims of the Third Reich evinces a profound sickness at the heart of the Christian faith. Both Holocaust theologians and ecclesial statements have made notable strides towards diagnosing and curing this illness through proposals to radically reshape Christian theology in the shadow of Holocaust atrocities. However, rarely have these proposals outlined revisions in the realm of practical theology, specifically relating to ecclesiology and how the Christian community might live as church in the post-Holocaust era. This study conducts an interdisciplinary analysis of dominant trends within post-Holocaust theology through the hermeneutical lens of the propensity to abandon, dominate, or eliminate the Other. It argues that the leitmotif of post-Holocaust proposals for revision, i.e. the refutation of antisemitism and a renewed emphasis on Christian/Jewish solidarity, is potentially an exacerbation of the problem of otherness rather than a corrective.

Chapter one cultivates a conceptual lens of a rejection of otherness, highlighting its pervasiveness and its deleterious implications for Christian churches. Chapter two surveys a wide range of post-Holocaust ecclesial statements as well as reflections by Holocaust theologians in order to portray the churches' own perception of their role during the Holocaust and how they have begun to reformulate Christian theology and practice in this light. Chapter three analyzes three dominant trends that come to light when the post-Holocaust landscape is assessed through the lens of otherness. Chapter four explores dynamics of Christian and ecclesial identity as a framework for the cultivation of multi-dimensional identities which make space for the Other. Finally, chapter five will briefly envision some ecclesial characteristics and practices that might better equip churches with the moral resources to resist a rejection of otherness and build an ethical responsibility for the Other into the core of ecclesial identity

INTRODUCTION CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION

Auschwitz has a message that must be heard: it reveals an illness operative not on the margin of our civilization but at the heart of it, in the very best we have inherited. The Holocaust challenges the foundations of Western society. It summons us to face up to the negative side of our religious and cultural heritage.¹

This study intersects Christian reflections on the Holocaust with the themes of otherness, exclusion, and identity. Through the creation of a conceptual lens composed of critical dynamics of otherness and its implications for ecclesiology, the work examines three problematic tendencies within post-Holocaust theology and discusses how these tendencies serve to potentially exacerbate the problem of a rejection of otherness rather than as a corrective. Ultimately, the study aims to offer a constructive contribution toward ecclesiology in a post-Holocaust world by reflecting on essential aspects of individual and ecclesial identity and delineating some characteristics and practices which might better equip churches to challenge the deeply ingrained tendency to abandon, dominate, or eliminate the Other.²

The work is guided by two contentions: first, a rejection of otherness is one of the most pressing issues facing the churches today, and second, the historical narrative of the churches under Hitler, as well as certain propensities within post-Holocaust theological reformations, exemplify the exigency of confronting the problem of otherness for the contemporary churches.

The study will grapple with three interrelated questions. First, how have Christian churches and Christian Holocaust scholars within Europe and North America understood and engaged with Christianity's role during the Holocaust? I seek to determine how the failure of individual Christians and Christian institutions

¹ Gregory Baum, "Introduction," in *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 7.

² I am indebted to Miroslav Volf for these terms. He describes abandonment, domination, and elimination as the three primary forms of exclusion of the Other. See "A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion" in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, David Tombs and Joseph Liechty, eds. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 24-26. Also, see Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 75.

to engage on behalf of victims of the Nazi regime is assessed. Put another way, how is the nature of this illness deep in the heart of the Christian faith diagnosed?³

Second, I will ask, what cure is put forward? I describe the re-envisioning that has taken place within Christian theology to begin to treat this profound sickness, which the Holocaust vividly reveals, paying close attention to ways in which these proposals could potentially exacerbate the problem of a rejection of otherness.

Third, I inquire how an analysis of the post-Holocaust landscape through the lens of a rejection of otherness might illumine some new dynamics of the churches' explanation of and engagement with the Holocaust, and reveal areas where constructive work remains to be undertaken.

II. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

A. Significance

An overwhelming body of scholarship exists which chronicles the churches' conduct under the Third Reich and laments that the majority of the churches were apathetic and ineffectual toward Nazi persecution. These scholars concur that the ethical failure of Christians to stand with their Jewish brothers and sisters during the Holocaust reveals a deep-seated malady within the Christian faith.⁴ Richard

³ In speaking of the failure of Christian institutions, I do not mean to discount that there were many brave individuals who stood up to the force of Nazi terror and those who intrepidly rescued Jews, facing great peril. There were also exceptional countries that corporately resisted Nazi efforts to deport Jews such as the Danish Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The annals of history show there were also communities of resistance such as the famous Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Vichy France. This study does not mean to downplay their great courage or sacrifice, nor the importance of researching those characteristics and values that enabled protesters and rescuers to portray such righteous behavior. The work here is concerned with the apostasy of the many, rather than the exceptional virtue of the few. The behavior of rescuers is particularly significant because, in most cases, rescuers acted without any kind of ecclesial support. Overall, churches as community and as institutions failed to help victims of the Nazi regime, and many times failed to even see a need to do so. Franklin Littell has scathing words for those who would hold up sterling examples of resistance and rescue as "proof" that the church did not fail or commit wholesale apostasy during that dark time. "The worst set of crimes in the history of mankind were engineered by the Ph.D's and committed baptized Christians. Until the churches have come clean on that massive Event, and stop trying to hide behind the skirts of an occasional Bonhoeffer or Delp, of whom they are not worthy, no amount of abstract reference to 'humanity' or universalism will save them from a very specific and particular end: damnation." *Crucifixion of the Jews* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 40-41.

⁴ The failure of the churches to speak out against Nazi treatment of the Jews and other victims is documented in many works, e.g. Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*; Robert P. Erickson and Susannah Heschel eds., *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1999), Victoria Barnett *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (Oxford University Press, 1992), Barnett *Bystanders: Conscience and*

Gutteridge contends, “The picture as a whole is dismal. One of the most glorious opportunities to make proof of Christian profession through Christian action was, taken as a whole, missed and unexercised.”⁵ Franklin Littell agrees,

In the convulsion of history which was the Holocaust, Christendom stands exposed in rebellion and betrayal of the most awful measure....The Holocaust is the major event in recent centuries of Christian history precisely because it exposed the thinness of the veneer which covered with a sham Christianity the actual devotion of the European tribes to other gods.⁶

Littell believes that the Christian faith itself has been “put to the question” because of the apostasy of millions of baptized Christians.⁷ The almost unfathomable account of professing Christians during the Holocaust (within Germany as well as beyond) has resulted in an unprecedented credibility for the Christian faith. Because it cannot simply be dismissed as part of someone else’s history (i.e. Nazis’, the Jews’, the Germans’, our ancestors’, etc.), the Holocaust accosts Christians as part of *our* history: it is eternally and inescapably intertwined with Christian history and with the construction of Christian identity. Michael McGarry concurs:

The Shoah is a part of Christian history. It is part of our history, if we are Christian. This is frightening, this is sickening, for many, unbelievable. But the first thing we Christians need to recognize is that we study the Shoah

Complicity During the Holocaust (Praeger Publishers, London, 1999), Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz ed., *Christlicher Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus: Theologische und kirchliche Programme Deutscher Christen* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen, 1994), Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1950* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), Guenther Lewy, *The Catholic Church in Nazi Germany*, Kurt Meier, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Die Evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), and Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke, eds., *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Mellen University Press, 1974).

For works which focus specifically on the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany, see Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett; and Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites and the Nazi State* (Mellen, 1986).

⁵ Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), 167.

⁶ Littell, quoted in Alice Eckardt, “The Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Responses,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 42:3 (1974), 467.

⁷ See Eckardt, *Essential Papers on Jewish-Christian Relations*, 211-212.

because it is part of our history, as well as part of Jewish history. Not only do we study what happened to them but what happened to us Christians.⁸

Elwyn Smith makes a similar indictment:

To say that the Holocaust is a Christian catastrophe is rather to say that Christians outside Germany are coming to recognize that the Holocaust was not part of someone else's history—the Jews or the Germans—but that it was and remains an event in church history.⁹

A. Roy Eckardt adds, “The turning of human beings—the people of God and of the Torah—into excrement took place under the aegis of a country that represented the highest values of Christian and Western civilization: here the singularity and the lesson of the Holocaust are finally revealed.”¹⁰ These scholars emphasize that a pall is cast over the theological landscape of the Christian faith, leaving it forever altered. Henceforth, it should not be possible to go about doing theology or being church with a “business as usual” mindset. Unfortunately, many churches and congregations continue to go about the “business” of church as if very little has changed or been challenged since the Holocaust. David Gushee perceptively describes this phenomenon,

The Holocaust was not merely an event in Christian history but in fact a nauseating Christian moral failure. What makes this moral failure all the worse is that it has never been adequately addressed by those who bear the name of Christ. Certainly considerable work has been done in a very small circle of Christian scholars to address such issues. But most churches and many Christian thinkers have not dealt with the problem at all. The daily business of Christian living. . . goes on as if it never happened that just barely a generation ago once-Christian Europe turned on its Jewish minority and left 6 million shot and gassed and burned to death in less than 4 years.¹¹

Not only does the Holocaust represent a profound crisis for Christian theology, but it also poses a fundamental crisis for civilization and for our

⁸ See Michael McGarry, “A Christian Passes Through Yad Vashem” in *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Challenges from the Past, Lessons for the Future*, eds. Carol Rittner et al. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 2.

⁹ Elwyn Smith, “The Christian Meaning of the Holocaust,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 6 (Summer 1969): 419-420.

¹⁰ A. Roy Eckardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting*, 32

¹¹ David Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation*, 13-14.

conceptions of humanity in the modern age. Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman asserts that the Holocaust represents the clearest manifestation of tendencies latent within the culture of modernity. He says,

Every “ingredient” of the Holocaust—all those many things that rendered it possible—was normal... in the sense of being fully in keeping with everything we know about civilization, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world—and of the proper ways to pursue human happiness together with a perfect society.¹²

Because the Holocaust burgeoned from within a modern society at the height of rationality, civilization, and cultural achievement, it represents a weighty problem for modern society and culture. Bauman proposes that we “treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society.”¹³

Likewise, John T. Pawlikowski speaks of a new era ushered in by the unbridled freedom of the Holocaust:

A new era in human self-awareness and human possibility, an era capable of producing unprecedented destruction or unparalleled hope. With the rise of Nazism, the mass extermination of human life in a guiltless fashion became thinkable and technologically feasible. The door was now ajar for dispassionate torture and the murder of millions not out of xenophobic fear, but through a calculated effort to reshape history, supported by intellectual argumentation from some of the best and brightest minds in the society.¹⁴

Likewise, Kren and Rappoport portray the Holocaust as the “moral equivalent of the Copernican revolution.”¹⁵ They write that after the Holocaust we can no longer assert that morals are at the center of the universe. This claim has become void of meaning.

¹² Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 8.

¹³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 92.

¹⁴ Quoted in Signer, *Humanity at the Limits*, 16. Elsewhere, Pawlikowski says that what emerges from the Holocaust as a central reality is the Nazi effort to create the “superperson”, that is “to develop a truly liberated humanity, to be shared in only by a select number (i.e., the Aryan race). The new humanity would be free of the moral restraints imposed by previous religious beliefs and would be capable of exerting virtually unlimited power in the shaping of the world and its inhabitants. God was dead as an effective force in governing the universe.” “Christian Ethics and the Holocaust: A Dialogue with Post-Auschwitz Judaism” in *Theological Studies*, 49 (1998), 651.

¹⁵ George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport, *The Holocaust and Its Crisis for Human Behavior* (New York, Holmes and Meier, 1980), 131-132.

Most significant for our purposes here is the contention that this abysmal period in church history evokes ineluctable questions about our traditional conceptions of ecclesiology and commands a serious internal critique about the nature and value of the church itself, particularly the nature of the church in world riven by a rejection of otherness. The dismal narrative of the churches under the Third Reich shows that ecclesiastical institutions were, in the main, not equipped with the moral resources necessary to evaluate their ethical responsibility toward the suffering Other, much less to act in an ethical manner. Stephen D. Smith explains that the credibility crisis Christianity faces hinges on the question of why so few Christians actually demonstrated *Christian* behavior under the Third Reich. He explains,

The Christian message should have resulted in Christians behaving in a better way than those around them through the redemptive power of Christ's salvation. That Christians on the whole failed to do so casts doubt upon the credibility of their Christian practice.¹⁶

Smith points out that not only did the vast majority of Christians fail to respond ethically towards those who were suffering, but many non-Christians, “were entirely *christian* in what they were prepared to do,” (that is, many of those who courageously rescued Jews were not professed Christians). The irony, says Smith, is that “the very religion that lent its name to the virtues of moral humanitarianism was unable to demonstrate such virtue consistently—certainly not as an institution.”¹⁷ In the preface of her book on the German Christian Movement, Doris Bergen poses an acute question, “What is the value of religion, in particular of Christianity, if it provides no defense against brutality and can even become a willing participant in genocide?”¹⁸ G. Peter Fleck adds, “There is something terribly wrong with a system of thought, a religion and a civilization that could bring forth and tolerate such an abomination. And there must be something wrong with a church that observed near total silence and inaction during the horror.”¹⁹

¹⁶ The Failure of Goodness: In Search of the *christian* Christian” in *Good News After Auschwitz?*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 22.

¹⁷ Ibid, 25.

¹⁸ Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, xi.

¹⁹ G. Peter Fleck, “Jesus in the Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *The Christian Century*, 100:29 (1983), 905.

While some might deem these indictments unwarranted because the churches were completely powerless to do anything because of the nature of Hitler's totalitarian rule, there is a substantial body of research indicating this was simply not the case.²⁰ For example, Helen Fein does a country-by-country analysis to try to understand those who did and did not oppose the Nazi regime and offer succor to Jews, and why they did so. She observes that "German instigation and organization of extermination usually succeeded because of the lack of counter authorities resisting their plans, not because of their repression of such resistance."²¹ In her analysis, Fein argues that the church was the ideal institution to spearhead such resistance because it (1) had leaders throughout the state with access to the ruling elite, (2) had members spanning across all social strata with the resources to shelter Jews, and (3) was a respected institution with the ability to substantially legitimate or de-legitimate National Socialist policies. Fein's data suggests that the churches under Nazi Germany had the potential to make a profound difference. She concludes, "The greater the church resistance, the fewer Jews became victims."²²

²⁰ While cognizant of the great difficulties and perils which both individuals and ecclesial communities faced in offering any kind of resistance during the totalitarian reign of the Nazi regime, the historical narrative of the churches' behavior *after* the fall of the Third Reich is also especially troubling. Particularly incriminating is the historical evidence that in the immediate aftermath of the war both the Vatican and branches of German Protestant leadership were actively involved in undermining the war crime tribunals for high-ranking Nazi officers. The Vatican even went as far as enabling some of the most notorious Nazis to escape prosecution through Operation Ratline. See, for example, Ronald Webster, "Opposing 'Victors' Justice': German Protestant Churchmen and Convicted Criminals in Western Europe after 1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15 (2001): 47-69; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust 1930-1965* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 162-175; Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Katharina von Kellenbach "The German Churches and the Nuremberg Trials," *International Bonhoeffer Society Newsletter* No. 79 (Summer): 5-6. Susannah Heschel describes the behavior of many of the Vatican's priests at the end of the war as "the most damning piece of evidence." She says, "Pius XII might have been intimidated before the spring of 1945, but why did he remain silent after Hitler's defeat?" Heschel continues, "No less a figure than Franz Stangl was spirited to South America by an underground railroad of Catholic priests, under the guidance of the Vatican's own bishop, Alois Hudal." This was the same Stangl who, as the commandant of the Treblinka extermination camp, had the blood of over nine hundred thousand people on his hands. Thus, Heschel concludes that the Vatican's real attitudes toward persecutors of Jews are made clear in these post-war actions. The "intriguing question is what might have motivated the Vatican to assist those murderers. Could it be that the Vatican felt closer ties to the Nazis than the Jews? Which lives did the Church really want to save." Heschel, "The Vatican and the Holocaust," *Dissent* (Summer, 1998): 113-14; Quoted in Madigan, "Has the Papacy 'Owned' Vatican Guilt for the Church's Role in the Holocaust?" in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4, Plenary address given at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations (Boca Raton, FL, 2009), 13.

²¹ Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 90.

²² Fein continues "Where both state and church refused to sanction discrimination—as in Denmark—internal resistance was highest. Where the state or native administrative bureaucracy began to

Others have contended, especially in the immediate years after the Holocaust, that the vast majority of church members living under the Third Reich were simply unaware of the genocide taking place against the Jews. However this contention has been proven highly dubious on historical grounds. For example, Peter Longerich's research about what ordinary Germans knew concluded "General information concerning the mass murder of Jews was widespread in the German population."²³ In addition, Victoria Barnett describes how scholarship has disproved the spurious notion that the international community and its leaders did not learn about the atrocities taking place behind Nazi borders until it was far too late. She says "Throughout the 1930's, knowledge about events in Nazi Germany was fairly extensive... detailed information about the death camps and the scope of genocide was beginning to reach the Allied countries by late 1941."²⁴

"We live in the type of society that made the Holocaust possible" indicts Bauman, "and that contained nothing which could stop the Holocaust from happening."²⁵ Could the same still be said of the post-Holocaust church? Are the contemporary churches now equipped with the moral resources to ensure that another people group will never again suffer the fate of the Jews? Have they begun to repudiate those teachings and practices within their faith that could be twisted against the Jews, as well as other people groups deemed "undesirables"? The haunting words

cooperate, church resistance was critical in inhibiting obedience to authority, legitimating subversion and/or checking collaboration directly. Church protest proved to be the single element present in every instance in which state collaboration was arrested—as in Bulgaria, France, and Rumania. Church protest was absent in virtually all cases in which state cooperation was not arrested. Church protest was also the intervening variable most highly related to the immediacy of social defense movements that enabled Jews successfully to evade deportation. The majority of Jews avoided deportation in every state occupied by or allied with Germany in which the head of the dominant church spoke out *publically* against deportation before or as soon as it began." See *Accounting for Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 67-71. Also see Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, the Germans and the Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), particularly chapter 8, "The Attitudes of the Churches." In this chapter, Gordon notes that "Very few Catholic leaders preached against racial persecution [and] even fewer Protestants did so." 255

²³ See Longerich *Davon haben wir nichts gewusst: Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (München: Siedler Verlag, 2006). Also see Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and David Bankier *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) particularly chapter 6.

²⁴ Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*, (Westport: CT: Praeger Press, 2000), 48. Barnett continues, "Information about actual genocide spread more slowly, initially in the form of rumors about atrocities on the eastern front. Because similar reports during World War I had proven to be unfounded, these new accounts were treated with caution, especially in the press."

²⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 88.

of Yehuda Bauer echo the importance of this question. He asks, “Who knows who the ‘Jews’ will be the next time?”²⁶ The violent chapters of recent history in places such as Rwanda, Burundi, the Balkans, Cambodia, Darfur, and numerous others illustrate the exigency of this question. David Gushee summarizes the problem aptly: Christians should be able to be optimistic that our faith can cultivate the values of love and justice, or at least *not produce genocide*. He laments,

Long study of the Holocaust, and now fresh study of the Rwandan genocide, has led me to the heartbroken realization that the presence of Churches in a country guarantees nothing. The self-identification of people with the Christian faith guarantees exactly nothing.²⁷

The year 2013 marked eighty years since Adolph Hitler began his reign as Führer of the National Socialist regime in Germany, beginning the Nazi policies of disenfranchisement and brutality that would result in the destruction of more than two-thirds of Europe’s Jews, as well as countless other “undesirables” in the Third Reich. Since that dark time, both post-Holocaust theologians and ecclesial statements have made courageous proposals to radically reshape Christian theology in light of these atrocities in an effort to ensure that never again will such carnage take place while the majority of the Christian world stands by. The post-Holocaust avowal “Never again!” is certainly the appropriate call to action, and undoubtedly a resolution which Christians should hope for, pray for, and strive for. Yet, in reality, “Never again” is not a promise that the contemporary churches are able to make, because they are not equipped, by and large, with the resources necessary to be able to keep such a promise, however well intentioned it may be.

Amidst the laudable body of Christian post-Holocaust reformations stemming from Europe and North America, there is still a chasm between the work being done in the academy and within the higher echelons of ecclesia, and the translation of that work into concrete changes in ecclesial conceptions and practices. A bridge must be constructed between scholarly revisionism and substantial, practical transformations

²⁶ Quoted in Carol Rittner, ed., *From the Unthinkable to the Unavoidable*, 76.

²⁷ Gushee “Why the Churches Were Complicit: Confessions of a Broken-Hearted Christian” in *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches*, Carol Rittner ed. (Newark, UK: Paragon House Press, 2004), 260.

within Christian communities as the churches begin to wrestle with the ramifications of the Holocaust for their own identity and praxis. Parish minister Douglas Huneke elucidates what wrestling with some of these “scandalous questions” might look like:

What are the implications of the certainty that so many Christians collaborated in the barbarities of the era and so few churches became communities of resistance and agents of compassion? What will post-Shoah churches learn from the experiences of Nazi-era churches? Will they ignore the lessons and implications of history? *How will they reform dangerous teachings and practices that could be used to turn believers against yet another group of human beings?* What word will the church speak when modern-day haters grasp after the public will? What will be the role of the church in matters of global unrest, violations of human and civil rights, and acts of mass destruction?²⁸

A chorus of scholarly voices concurs that the failure of the churches under the Third Reich betrays a deep-seated malignancy within the Christian faith that must be remedied if the credibility of Christianity is ever to be restored. Whether such a restoration is possible and what it might look like has been contentiously debated, but one dominant area of agreement lies in the need to expunge all traces of antisemitism from Christian thought and practice. If antisemitism is the malignant tumor that has metastasized throughout the ecclesial body, then the remedy lies in a complete and swift exsection of this malignancy.

While deeply cognizant of the churches’ legacy of antisemitism, its unique features, and its carcinogenic ramifications for Christian doctrine and practice, I wish to suggest that viewing the post-Holocaust narrative more broadly through the hermeneutical lens of a rejection of otherness might reveal a new dynamic of this cancer within the Christian faith. If the failure of the churches can be diagnosed as something even more pervasive and universal than the malady of antisemitism, how might we even begin to look for a cure and how might a remedy be translated practically and concretely into the practices of the churches?

²⁸ Huneke, *The Stones Will Cry Out*, 65-66.

B. Contributions

The combination of three fields of study that rarely converge in academic scholarship: otherness, Holocaust theology, and practical ecclesiology offer several distinct contributions.

First, the study provides an in-depth reflection on the underlying cultural substrata of a rejection of otherness, highlighting its complexities, and especially its capability to nullify the prophetic witness of the church. The creation of a unique conceptual lens, composed of psychological, sociological, cultural, and theological dynamics of otherness offers valuable insights into the critical dynamics of a rejection of otherness and elucidates why it is incumbent on Christian churches to take the perils of a rejection of otherness seriously in our contemporary, pluralistic context.

Second, the work contributes to the field of post-Holocaust theology in two ways. First, by shining the lens of a rejection of otherness on the historical narrative of the churches under Hitler, it seeks to discern some new dynamics therein, particularly regarding how a rejection of otherness was a significant militating factor in the churches' ethical response toward victims of the Nazi regime. Second, investigating theological proposals for reformation within Christian post-Holocaust theology from the unique perspective of a rejection of otherness illuminates tendencies which, while thoroughly well-intentioned, have the potential to exacerbate the problem of a rejection of otherness.

Third, the study aims to offer a modest contribution to practical theology and ecclesiology by offering some constructive proposals which seek to address the perceived disconnect between scholarly doctrinal revisions and their implementation into ecclesial praxis. Building on the current conversation regarding the philosophical and sociological challenge of otherness and exclusion for the churches,²⁹ the work will suggest some ecclesial characteristics and practices which

²⁹See particularly emerging scholarship by the Ecclesiastical Investigations research network. Three pertinent publications, borne out of academic symposiums, are *Church and the Religious 'Other' Questions on Questions on Truth, Unity and Diversity*, Gerard Mannion, ed. (T & T Clark, 2008); *Ecumenical Ecclesiology: Unity, Diversity and Otherness in a Fragmented World*, Gesa Elsabeth Thiessen ed. (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011); and *Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times*, Dennis Doyle, Pascal D. Bazzell, Timothy J. Furry, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).

might better enable churches to resist the penchant to reject otherness and to cultivate identities which are capable of making space for the Other.

III. MOTIVATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

It might be helpful to explain a little about my own contextual starting point and assumptions in writing this work. Throughout the process of this dissertation, I have been asked—why bother with *yet another* dissertation on the Holocaust—when certainly there are much more critical, contemporary matters facing the churches today which the theologian must attend to. My interest in this research topic stems considerably from my own national and ecclesial context. In reflecting upon my participation in the rhythms and rituals of a conservative congregation in the Midwest of the United States, I realized that church, for me, had offered a veritable oasis from the Other, a refuge where I could be comforted and strengthened by those who shared my same beliefs and a platform to learn apologetic strategies as a means to convert those who did not. While perhaps my own ecclesiological baggage weighs too heavily here, I do not believe my experience to be an isolated one, but indicative of a much larger pattern in the way church is often understood and lived out.

As an American, the knowledge that I am part of a country literally founded upon the oppression of others, provokes a host of disconcerting questions. Despite the fact that perhaps no other nation boasts the merits of pluralism and tolerance quite like the United States, the subjugation, assimilation, and annihilation of the Other are deeply intertwined into the bedrock soil of my homeland. While Americans typically consider themselves exempt from moral responsibility for what took place during the Holocaust, I do not envision the German churches share in the blame alone. The passive conduct of Christian leaders and their congregations in my own country is summarized succinctly by David Wyman in his study of American responses to the Holocaust: “At the heart of Christianity is the commitment to help the helpless. Yet, for the most part, America’s Christian churches looked away while the European Jews perished.”³⁰

³⁰ David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 320. Here, Wyman provides several pages of well-documented commentary

My grandparents' generation looked away and I am haunted by the question, "would I have done the same?" The disengagement and apathy of many in my own generation to genocides such as those which took place in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur, as well as to a host of more nuanced forms of a rejection of otherness, causes me to ponder if we are any different as Christians today than 70 years ago. Zygmunt Bauman states, "If there was something in our social order which made the Holocaust possible in 1941, we cannot be sure that it has been eliminated since then."³¹ Is this generation or the next any more equipped with the moral resources necessary to combat genocide, sectarianism, racism, xenophobia, or any other more "mild" manifestations of a rejection of otherness we might encounter?

Finally, Søren Kierkegaard reminds us, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."³² I write this thesis, centered on one of the most tumultuous and terrifying periods in human history, from the comfortable and privileged vantage point of hindsight—several generations after the fact. While I endeavor to critique the behavior of the churches during the Holocaust, as well as to challenge some patterns within post-Holocaust theology, it is hoped these reflections will not be construed as an arrogant or unmerciful condemnation of the past, but rather as an earnest quest to understand more clearly some vital implications for the future. My choice of this dissertation topic discloses my belief that a rejection of the Other is one of the most pressing issues for ecclesiology today.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Even to begin to address the complexities of the issues here will require ongoing interdisciplinary efforts from scholarship in a number of disciplines—psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and history, in addition to theology. It is my hope that by creating an interface between these diverse disciplines, some previously obscured elements of Christian praxis and ideology will become clearer. First, a few

on the indifference and ineffectiveness of the vast majority of Christian pastors and leaders in America.

³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 86.

³² J. Collins, *The mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 37.

words about each of the three primary disciplines being engaged here: otherness, the Holocaust, and practical theology/ecclesiology.

A. Otherness

The study is founded on the contentions that (1) the impulse to protect ourselves from the Other³³ resides at the very core of human existence and that (2) this pathology to reject otherness is fundamentally an ecclesial problem, not simply an ethical or sociological one. This systemic problem of rejecting otherness, its roots, characteristics, and its deleterious effects on ecclesial practice will be the specific lens which guides my assessment here. The interrelated themes of otherness, exclusion, and identity, which are increasingly pertinent in sociological, theological, and philosophical discourse will be kept at the foreground throughout the work.

The study is concerned with how the lens of otherness enables us to explain and understand some of the dynamics within post-Holocaust theology and within contemporary ecclesiology. I argue that otherness is a valuable hermeneutical tool through which to observe certain patterns within the post-Holocaust landscape and gain significant insights for ecclesiology today. This conceptual lens also exposes that a significant factor underlying the churches' corporate failure under the Third Reich was the excommunication of the Other from the universe of moral obligation. While a rejection of otherness is certainly not the only pattern present within situations of genocide such as the Final Solution, I argue it a significant pattern that merits further scholarly attention.

My contention that a rejection of otherness is a significant dynamic within the narrative of post-Holocaust theology with tremendous import for contemporary theology demands careful explication of how I am utilizing some key terms here. Because a rejection of the Other is often unconscious and instinctive, rather than

³³ I have chosen to follow the practice common in philosophical, sociological, and anthropological literature of using the singular, capitalized case of "Other." However, a caveat is in order here to ensure that the singular usage is not misunderstood as implying that the Other is somehow a homogenous or abstract entity, devoid of distinct features. Rather, as Volf points out, "The grammatical singular denotes a plural reality." Volf astutely portrays the inherent complexity of the term other saying, "The other is a shorthand way to open a window to a richly diverse reality, not the indicator of the full content of that reality." Volf, "Living with the Other," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39 (2002), 11.

deliberate, rational, or vindictive, the phrase can be potentially misleading. In this work, the phrases “rejection of otherness” and a “rejection of the Other” are used as rather imprecise shorthand to encapsulate the numerous ways that the Other may be ignored, silenced, assimilated, objectified, oppressed, or eliminated. Thus, the phrase cannot be equated simply with an overt or calculated decision to jettison the Other from the sphere of moral care and concern; it can signal a blindness toward the Other, a deep-seated discomfort toward otherness, or simply an innate impulse for the strangeness and the terror of the Other to be assuaged.

I employ the term otherization throughout this study to designate the manner in which otherness and normal processes of diversity and differentiation can turn lethal as boundaries of identity and solidarity are constructed deleteriously vis-à-vis the Other. Otherization denotes the gradual psychological and sociological trajectory whereby seemingly benign ways of rejecting the Other can transform the reality of the Other’s presence into a negative menace, one which is ultimately devoid of the image of Divine and excluded from the universe of moral obligation.

Another concept that bears clarification here is exclusion, which can also evoke connotations of a conscious, active choice to preclude the Other from our world. As chapter one will describe, the practice of exclusion is manifested in a wide variety of ways, both “mild” and murderous, but springs fundamentally from the desire to preserve a safe, sanitized version of our own self-enclosed world.³⁴ Thus, it is important to emphasize that processes of exclusion do not necessarily stem from a conscious or fully developed ideology of disdain for the Other; exclusion often emerges, on an individual and institutional level, from more passive and ostensibly noble motives such as for self-protection. Thus, exclusion should not be imagined as tantamount to desiring a world without the Other, but can be as simple as wanting to keep the Other at a safe and comfortable distance. In this work, I utilize the term abjection, which literally means “being cast off” to describe the most extreme and active form of antipathy toward the Other. Abjection “defines nations, peoples, groups, values, beliefs, as inferior, noxious, corrupt poisonous.”³⁵

³⁴ Thus, Miroslav Volf emphasizes that the inner logic of exclusion has a certain form of purity at its core. Miroslav Volf and Judith M. Gundry Volf, *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 49.

³⁵ James M. Glass, *Psychosis and Power: Threats to Democracy in the Self and the Group* (Cornell University Press, 1995), 26.

I find Levinas' metaphor of an allergy to the Other to be particularly helpful here in expounding the pervasiveness of humanity's aversion toward otherness, as well as the potential human beings possess for contending against this malady. It is important to note that Levinas does not see otherness in and of itself as problematic, for the presence of the Other and the reality of otherness are ineluctable aspects of human existence. Levinas insists that ethical responsibility for the Other is both fundamental and inescapable—as an essential structure of human subjectivity.³⁶ In asserting that humanity is inflicted from birth with an allergy to the Other, Levinas strongly challenges the foundations of the Western philosophical tradition as inherently incapable of meeting the Other without seeking to reduce the Other to sameness and totality.³⁷ Levinas' metaphor elucidates that a profoundly engrained aversion towards otherness is a universal pathology, but one which human beings are still responsible to contend against through the ethical choices they make in relation to the Other. Thus all of humanity is plagued with an allergy to the Other, this work is interested in how Christian communities might better reckon with this allergy amidst the inescapable reality of an encounter with the Other.

It is also important to recognize that from the perspective of reflections upon otherness, "God is," says Ronald Allen, "the great Other who is Other to all Others."³⁸ Hence the danger latent in myopia towards the Other is that it can also induce myopia toward the will and work of God. There are many similarities between the way we encounter the human Other and how we approach the Divine Other. In both encounters, there is a grave tendency to shape the Other into our own image. Awareness of our susceptibility toward idolatry reminds us that all our conceptions of and statements about God, the Great Other, are fragmentary and susceptible to distortions, just as our conceptions of the human Other.³⁹

³⁶ See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, "Ideology and Idealism" in *Modern Jewish Ethics*, Marvin Fox, ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 137.

³⁷ Levinas describes the nature of this allergy as "egology," where the self never learns anything from the Other because in the encounter with otherness, otherness is immediately denied; the Other is reduced to a category which the self already possesses. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 50.

³⁸ Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights*, 34.

³⁹ David Tracy warns of the danger of idolatry saying, "The true God can nonetheless become . . . merely a projected Other to whom we egoistically cling. When even prophetic denunciations of our idolatry cannot break through our compulsive clinging to an ultimately idolatrous God, then the modern Christian theologian, listening to the challenge of the Buddhist insight that belief in 'God' can be the most egoistic clinging, may rejoin Meister Eckhart and pray, 'I pray to God to free me from

Finally, the study aims to be primarily non-theoretical. I intend to speak prescriptively and constructively about being church in a world saturated with otherness, rather than to construct a “theology of the Other” in the abstract. Much more will be said concerning the elusive notion of the Other in chapter one.

B. The Holocaust

There are several reasons I have chosen to situate my study within the context of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ While the history of the Christian church is indelibly marred with

God.” David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1991), 82. For essays on the otherness of God from a theological and philosophical perspective see *The Otherness of God*, Studies in Religion and Culture, Orrin F. Summerell, ed. (University of Virginia Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ The word “Holocaust” can be employed in a narrow or broad sense, which reflects an enduring controversy about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and definitions regarding victimization under the Third Reich. Narrowly, “Holocaust” refers to the specific, systematic annihilation of approximately six million Jews under the National Socialist regime. Broadly, the term is employed to encompass the destruction of both Jewish victims and non-Jewish victims such as Poles, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the physically and mentally impaired. In the 1970s, Simon Wiesenthal posited the figure of eleven million to include six million Jewish victims and five million non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. It should be noted that this figure is a symbolic rather than historical figure, which was popularized through the creation of the Simon Wiesenthal center and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. Michael Berenbaum summarizes the eleven million’s symbolic importance saying, “The numbers reflect Jewish primacy, and also an unequal balance in victimization, more Jews than non-Jews, but not overwhelmingly so.” See “How Should the Holocaust be Understood: The Elie Wiesel/Simon Wiesenthal Controversy of the late 1970’s,” in *Antisemitism: The Generic Hatred. Essays in Memory of Simon Wiesenthal*, Michael Fineberg et al. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 160. Yehuda Bauer calls the figure of eleven million, “sheer nonsense” in purely historical terms saying “The total number of people who died in concentration camps during the war period—excepting Jews and Gypsies—was about half a million, perhaps a little more. On the other hand, the total number of non-Jewish civilian casualties during the war caused by Nazi brutality cannot be less than 20-25 million.” In “Whose Holocaust?” *Midstream*, vol 26:9, (1980), 43. Likewise, Peter Novick says, “Five million is either much too low (for all non-Jewish civilians killed by the Third Reich) or much too high (for non-Jewish groups targeted, like Jews, for murder.” See *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 215. More recently, Edward Westermann argues that the National Socialist regime murdered as many as 31,595,000 persons, including an estimated 19,315,000 persons within Nazi occupied Europe alone. “Killers” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, John K. Roth and Peter Hayes eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152.

While the Holocaust can certainly be considered part of the Nazis’ comprehensive web of carnage, in this work, “Holocaust” is meant to convey first and foremost the unprecedented assault on Jewish life, encompassing the sum total of the events in central and Eastern Europe from 1933-1945, including the disenfranchisement of Jews, their segregation, starvation, and ghettoization, culminating in the methodical, technological attempt to wipe every Jewish man, woman, child, and fetus from the face of the earth. While many peoples and groups were considered “undesirables” in the Third Reich, the Nazi killing machine reserved their full wrath to be unleashed exclusively on the Jews. The desideratum of the Reich was a *Judenrein* world. In the end, of the nine million Jews who lived in European countries which fell under German rule during the war, about six million—that is two-thirds of all European Jews—were shot, hanged, starved, gassed, or tortured to death, primarily in concentration camps. For statistics on the European Jews killed see: Michael Shermer and Alex

accounts of genocide and murder just in the 20th century alone, I contend that the Holocaust reveals the cultural substrata of a rejection of otherness in vivid and unparalleled ways. Striking in the narrative of the Holocaust is the Other-hating nature of Nazism, the susceptibility of Christian churches to ideologies that expel the Other from the universe of moral concern, and the devastating effects this expulsion has for ecclesial vocation and practice.

First, the *raison d'être* of Nazism, which fomented in Germany between 1933 and 1945, was the annihilation of the Other. Its highest aim was *Gleichschaltung*, a comprehensive process of synchronization to bring all of German society in line with Nazi ideology. Victoria Barnett says, "The ultimate goal of Gleichschaltung was to capture the souls and minds of the German people. Hitler demanded not only obedience but a kind of faith."⁴¹ This homogenization sought first and foremost the

Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 174.

Elie Wiesel has famously argued that the Holocaust is a uniquely Jewish experience saying, "Not all victims [of the Nazis] were Jews, all Jews were victims, destined for annihilation solely because they were born Jewish. They were doomed not because of something they had done or proclaimed or acquired but because of who they were: sons and daughters of the Jewish people." *President's Commission on the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C., 1979) iii. Thus, the distinctive nature of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust must be persevered and will be kept at the forefront throughout this work. While cognizant of the unparalleled nature of Jewish suffering, I do endeavor to offer a sustained reflection on other victims of the Nazi regime, whose destruction, I argue, also bears significant import for the churches and continues to demand critical theological reflection. The question of why the churches were also silent to the destruction of numerous unwanted others is a haunting one. Thus, throughout this work, I will employ the phrase "unfortunate expendables"* to draw attention to the fact that other victim groups such as Poles, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals were regarded as utterly dispensable within the Third Reich. *This phrase was coined by Nora Levin, *The Holocaust* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 693. See Sybil Milton, "The Context of the Holocaust," *German Studies Review* 13 (1990): 269-283 for a discussion of the controversy surrounding people groups who should be included as victims of the Holocaust.

Finally, I primarily utilize the term Holocaust throughout this work, unless quoting, although cognizant of the term's problematic, sacrificial connotations (Holocaust comes from the Greek *holokaustos*, which means a sacrifice burnt completely on the altar). The Hebrew alternatives, Shoah and Churban, are both biblical words which connote catastrophic destruction, but are also problematical because they can imply divine retribution of sorts. Thus, Holocaust is used here simply because it is the most widely known in the Western world and its usage dominates the discourse on both an academic and popular level. For discussions of Holocaust terminology and the appropriateness of using the word "Holocaust" see: Omer Bartov, "Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Reinterpretation of National Socialism," in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, The Unknown, The Disputed, and The Reexamined*, Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck eds., (Indiana University Press, 1998), 78-82; Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman "Why Do We Call the Holocaust 'The Holocaust'? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels," *Modern Judaism*, vol. 9:2 (1989): 197-211; Tom Lawson, "Shaping the Holocaust: Understanding the European Jewish Tragedy in Christian Discourse, 1945-2005," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 21:3 (2007), 404-420; and Jon Petrie, "The Secular Word Holocaust: Scholarly Myths, History and Twentieth Century Meanings," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2 (2000), 31-63.

⁴¹ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 32.

eradication of the Jewish people, but desired nothing less than a thoroughgoing destruction of *all* heterogeneity. The Nazi avarice for *Lebensraum* left absolutely no room for the Other within the universe of the Third Reich.⁴²

Second, the Holocaust confronts us with how easily Christians of numerous backgrounds and beliefs can be captivated by ideologies of indifference, exclusion, and hate. National Socialism emerged in the heart of civilized Western Christian Europe where the vast majority of Germans were products of Christian culture, family, and education. In 1939, 94% of the German population held membership in the Protestant or Catholic Churches; whereas only 1.5% considered themselves to be unbelievers.⁴³ Germany was a nation of Christians who took their religion very seriously. However, the desire for a world rid of the Other was certainly not a German desideratum, nor an exclusively Protestant or Catholic one. The genocidal destruction of the Jews and others who were considered “unfortunate expendables” engaged churches throughout a variety of countries, with no restriction to Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox branches of Christianity.⁴⁴

Third, the role of the churches during the Holocaust reveals a vivid pattern of a rejection of otherness and is a striking testimony to the lack of the moral resources demanded to act on behalf of the persecuted Other, even when the life of the Other was at stake.⁴⁵ It undoubtedly illustrates the danger for the church when boundaries

⁴² The purge of otherness in the historical context of Nazi Germany will be explored in greater detail in chapter II.

⁴³ Of those belonging to churches, 40% identified themselves as Catholic and 54% as Protestant. See the July 3, 1944 report to Josef Goebbels on church membership and finances in Peter Matheson, ed., *The Third Reich and the Churches* (T&T Clark Publishers, 1981), 99-101.

⁴⁴ An argument can also be made that the Holocaust engaged a number of countries and individuals outwith Europe. Many Western governments, for example, were fully aware of the “Jewish question” but did very little to relax restrictive immigration policies in favor of Jewish refugees and often even shut their borders, refusing to accept Jewish emigrants trying to flee from Nazi-occupied territories (e.g. the highly publicized case in May/June of 1939, when the United States refused to grant entrance to over 900 Jewish refugees who had sailed from Hamburg, Germany on the *St. Louis*). For a nuanced account of how various countries responded to Jewish persecution see: Yehuda Bauer, “Jew and Gentile: The Holocaust and After,” in Michael R. Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989) vol. 4:1, *The “Final Solution” Outside Germany*, 19-63.

⁴⁵ A reflection on rescuers or Righteous Gentiles during the Holocaust illustrates the possibilities available within the totalitarian rule of the Third Reich and confirms that there was, indeed, a range of choices that Christians had available under the Nazi regime. In this gamut of Christian behavior there were (few) rescuers, the vast majority were bystanders, and there were Christians who actively participated in the killings. David Gushee, among others, argues that this tragic mix of Christian behavior towards victims of the Holocaust confronts scholars with an exceptionally well-documented case study in Christian morality. He says what is troubling is that rescuers, bystanders, and murderers are all carrying out their respective acts under the name of Christ. See David Gushee, *Righteous*

of care and concern are constricted and when the Other has no place in the universe of moral obligation.⁴⁶

In contending that the Holocaust manifests a rejection of otherness in unparalleled ways, I do not discount the numerous other genocides or destruction of otherness that have taken place, and continue to— nor to imply that such patterns of a revulsion towards otherness are not vivid in many other instances as well. There is a debate within Holocaust scholarship regarding whether or not the Holocaust should be understood as something *sui generis* in the flow of history.⁴⁷ Many scholars take

Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2003). This range of behavior on the part of Christians prompts the question, how were these rescuers different from non-rescuing Christians and what was it in their beliefs, background, or personality that enabled them to act with compassion, rather than become bystanders or perpetrators? In a sense, rescuers problematize the behavior of the churches more significantly, because they illustrate that there were indeed a range of moral choices possible, in spite of the Nazis' draconian measures. Their noble deeds show decisively that the claim by some after the war that nothing could be done—is highly specious.

⁴⁶ The phrase “universe of obligation” is attributed to Helen Fein, whose actual phrase is “sanctified universe of obligation.” This universe is described as the circle of individuals or groups “toward whom obligations are owed; to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.” Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (Free Press, 1979), 4. Similar concepts can be found through works of sociology, altruism, etc. Ervin Staub prefers to speak of a “range of applicability” of values such as caring and the responsibility to ease other's suffering, and the human propensity to limit that range so that some people are excluded from compassion. See Staub “The Roots of Altruism and Heroic Rescue,” in *The World and I* (July 1988), 398. Inclusive boundaries of moral obligation are seen in the concept of the “species self” borrowed by rescuer researcher Eva Fogelman. A species self is capable of integrating a human identity which goes far beyond concepts of nationalism and race.” Fogelman, “The Rescuers: A Socio-psychological Study of Altruistic Behavior During the Nazi Era,” PhD. diss. (City University of New York, 1987), 216-7. Samuel and Pearl Oliner use the language of “extensivity” and “inclusiveness” to connote the rescuers' tendency to regard Jews and all other human beings as equally worth of rights and care. Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 165.

⁴⁷ The debate between Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal over who were victims of the Holocaust epitomizes the controversy regarding the unique or unprecedented nature of the Holocaust. For a summary of this dispute see Michael Berenbaum “How Should the Holocaust be Understood: The Elie Wiesel/Simon Wiesenthal Controversy of the late 1970's” in *Antisemitism: The Generic Hatred. Essays in Memory of Simon Wiesenthal*, Michael Fineberg et al. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007): 156-64. More recently, Steven Katz has undertaken the most ambitious attempt to argue that the Holocaust is “historically and phenomenologically unique,” maintaining that “Never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people... Only in the Third Reich was such all-inclusive, non-compromising, unmitigated murder intended.” See “The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: The Historical Dimension” in *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, 2nd ed., Alan S. Rosenbaum ed., (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 2001), 49-50; and his more comprehensive work *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For an overview of the debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and an annotated bibliography of salient literature see Alan Rosenberg and Evelyn Silverman, “The Issue of the Holocaust as a Unique Event” in *Genocide on our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions* Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidore Wallimann, (Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press, 1992); also Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Two Kinds of Uniqueness: The Universal Aspects of the Holocaust” in *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars*, Rochelle L. Millen ed., NYU

the stance that the Holocaust is indeed a unique and dreadful divergence from the moral confines of Western culture and civilization. The uniqueness of the Holocaust is not only seen historically, on account of the event's unprecedented mass destruction, but the uniqueness is also perceived theologically. For example, Emil Fackenheim characterizes the Holocaust as "*novum*" in history.⁴⁸ German theologian Johann Baptist Metz has called it an "interruption of theology's stream of ideas,"⁴⁹ and Darrell Fasching noted that it was "a caesura in which the ground opens beneath our feet and threatens to swallow up all human meaning."⁵⁰

While wary of the danger of indiscriminately enfolded the Holocaust within the sordid history of other human tragedies, thereby obscuring its particular dimensions, I do not work under the assumption that the Holocaust was a horrific rupture within an otherwise civil world, a position that I contend would risk severing the Holocaust from its wider, historical context. The Holocaust is understood in this work as the terrifying culmination of the primordial human impulse to expulse Jews, as well as other undesirables, from the universe of moral obligation. While hoping to preserve the unique, historical features of the Holocaust, as well as its "radicality of evil,"⁵¹ this study places the events of the Holocaust within the much broader context of human violence. The work of Michael Steele makes a similar contention,

The Holocaust, even with its crucially important distinguishing features, is the culminating point of a cultural process that has covered at least seventeen centuries. Western Europe's Christian culture and civilization did

Press, 1996, 6-18. More recent works discussing the singularity of the Holocaust include G. Heinsohn, "What Makes the Holocaust a Uniquely Unique Genocide?" *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 2:3 (2000): 411-430; Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, (Hanover, NH: Key Porter Books, 2000), 18-25; *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, 2nd ed., Alan S. Rosenbaum ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the Racial Century" in *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36:4 (2002), 7-36; Dan Stone, "The Historiography of Genocide: Beyond 'Uniqueness' and Ethnic Competition" in *Rethinking History*, vol. 8:1, (2004), 127-142; Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Between Uniqueness and Universalization: Holocaust Memory at a Dialectical Crossroads," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* (2011), 359-69.

⁴⁸ Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1989), 201.

⁴⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust*, Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschart-Kimmig, eds. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 13.

⁵⁰ Darrell Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

⁵¹ This phrase is borrowed from Isabel L. Wollaston, *A Comparative Study of Jewish and Christian Responses to the Holocaust* (Ph.D. diss., Durham University, 1989), 92.

not “fail” or take a detour or collapse. Indeed, operating as designed to do for centuries, Christianity, achieved an unparalleled peak of efficiency in the genocide of human “gardening” in the Nazi death camps.⁵²

Rabbi Irving Greenberg calls the Holocaust an orientating event for all future generations.⁵³ Even though the nature of the Holocaust was multi-causal, it does indeed reveal discomfiting truths about Christianity and the church. While the Holocaust was not spearheaded by the church (as were, for example, the Crusades and the Inquisitions) and Nazism was a complex concatenation of ideological beliefs including 19th century pseudoscientific racial theories, social Darwinism, and the purported superiority of Aryan master race, Christianity did play a dominant role, both culturally and theologically, in paving the way for the Holocaust. The principle that Christianity was indeed a necessary condition for the Holocaust, but not a sufficient one,⁵⁴ proves a reliable starting point for assessing the complexities of Christianity’s complicity in Nazi genocide. Stephen R. Haynes says,

This principle may be applied to Christian faith in the following way: Christianity was a *necessary condition* for the Holocaust, inasmuch as the statement “if there had been no Christianity, there would have been no Holocaust” is true. Christian faith was not a *sufficient condition* for the Holocaust inasmuch as the statement “since there was Christianity, there would eventually be a Holocaust” is not true.⁵⁵

Likewise, Jacob Katz says, “There is no way of explaining the rapid expansion of anti-Semitism and its deep penetration socially and psychologically other than by noting the ways in which it capitalized on the residue of traditional Jew-hatred.”⁵⁶

⁵² Michael Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 127.

⁵³ “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust,” in Eva Fleischner ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

⁵⁴ Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 290. In a similar fashion Marcel J. Dubois claims, “While I consider it a distortion of fact to say that Holocaust was the work of Christians—even though many of its perpetrators were *de facto* Christians—I admit that there is ample evidence that the centuries-old Christian anti-Judaism prepared the soil for modern antisemitism and the Holocaust. The Holocaust could not have happened if the Christians of Germany, Europe, the world, had taken an unequivocal stand against the Nazi program of persecution and extermination of the Jews. The reason why no such stand was taken, why so few prophetic voices were raised, is the strong antisemitism of the West, one of the roots of which has been Christian teaching.” *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism*, Otto D. Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr eds., (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel and Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987), 502 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁵ Haynes, *Holocaust Education and the Church-Related College*, 77.

⁵⁶ Jacob Katz, “Accounting for Anti-Semitism,” *Commentary*, vol 91:6 (1991), 54.

Thus, the events of the Holocaust reveal deformations in a number of previously undisputed aspects of Christian doctrine and practice.

It will also be helpful to briefly delineate some dominant historiographical approaches to the Third Reich and the Holocaust and reflect upon the kind of historiography I draw upon in this work. By the late 1970s, two distinct schools of thought emerged which offered historical explanations behind the motivations and decisions within the Nazi state that ultimately produced the Holocaust. These two models of interpretation—intentionalism and functionalism—reflected a debate about the connection between antisemitism, National Socialism, and the Final Solution.⁵⁷ The controversy revolved around an explanatory model centered on Nazi ideology, particularly antisemitism, as well as a model giving primacy to more practical, political factors within the Nazi state. The debate was more than an erudite endeavor to explain the origins of the Holocaust; it evoked critical questions about moral culpability and the motivation of perpetrators that continue to influence contemporary discussions. Tom Lawson summarizes the significance of the debate saying,

It was concerned with how one situated an account of the Holocaust within a more wide-ranging understanding of the modern world. It was also a debate over morality, ethics and the responsibility of the historian, and even the purpose of historical explanation itself.⁵⁸

At the crux of the intentionalist position was an emphasis on human agency and motivations, as well as an explanatory model of genocide where actions were intentionally chosen on the basis of ideology. Such an approach sought to comprehend Nazism and the National Socialist state from the inside and viewed historical phenomena under the Third Reich through the prism of beliefs and

⁵⁷ Coined by Tim Mason, the terms functionalism and intentionalism did not originally refer to the origins of the Holocaust but to the nature of the Nazi regime in general. See Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker eds. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 21-40. For a succinct discussion of the debate within Holocaust historiography between intentionalists and functionalists see Michael R. Marrus, "Historiography" in *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Walter Laqueur and Judith Tydor Baumel eds. (Yale University Press, 2001), 279-285; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th edition (London, 2000); and *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Dan Stone ed. (London, 2004), particularly chapters 2 and 8.

⁵⁸ Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Manchester University Press, 2011), 74.

intentions. Intentionalists typically envisioned that events within Nazi Germany were orchestrated by a singular core of ideologues.⁵⁹ For example, Lucy Dawidowicz claimed, “People are moved to action not by structures, but by their ambitions, intentions and goals. They are motivated by ideas, values, beliefs and the force of passion.”⁶⁰

Intentionalism assumed a direct, causal link between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, the Holocaust, and National Socialism. It typically regarded antisemitism, particularly its modern pseudo-scientific version, as the quintessence of the Nazi movement; the motivation behind the Final Solution stemmed almost entirely from antisemitic ideology. Thus, for intentionalists, the Holocaust was situated predominately within the unique context and course of German history and within the larger pattern of centuries of hatred of Jews, instead of being envisioned as the product of modernity or within the broader framework of genocidal violence throughout history.⁶¹

⁵⁹ While some intentionalists focused more on the ideology of Nazi leaders in general, many saw Hitler as the catalyst and impetus behind the Holocaust and placed him at center stage in the Nazi regime as “Master of the Third Reich.” They argued that the extermination of the Jews was Hitler’s main political aim from the outset and the pretext of war simply provided the cover needed to realize his long-held murderous intentions towards the Jews. Gerald Fleming, for example, concluded that Hitler was bent on exterminating the Jews from the beginning of his political career saying “The line that leads from these early manifestations to the liquidation orders that Hitler personally issued during the war... is a direct one.” In *Hitler and the Final Solution* (University of California Press, 1984), 2. For a more recent and detailed analysis of Hitler’s role in the Holocaust see Peter Longerich, *The Unwritten Order: Hitler’s Role in the Final Solution* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001). It should be noted that the extent of Hitler’s power and influence within the Nazi dictatorship was a significant controversy among intentionalists and functionalists. Ian Kershaw says the question revolved around “Whether the terrible events of the Third Reich are chiefly to be explained through the personality, ideology, and will of Hitler, or whether the Dictator himself was not at least in part a (willing) ‘prisoner’ of forces, of which he was the instrument rather than the creator, and whose dynamic swept him too along in its momentum.” *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretations*, 70.

⁶⁰ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945—Tenth Anniversary Edition* (London, 1987), xxiv. Other seminal contributions to Holocaust scholarship by intentionalists include Helmut Krausnick, “The Persecution of the Jews” in *Anatomy of the SS-State*, Hans Buchheim, et al., eds. (London, 1984); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (University of California Press, 1984); Andreas Hillgruber, “Die ideologisch-dogmatische Grundlage der nationalsozialistische Politik der Ausrottung der Juden in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion und ihre Durchführung, 1941-1944”, *German Studies Review* 2 (1979): 263-296; and Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan, 1975).

⁶¹ For intentionalists, the Final Solution stood in stark opposition to the defining features of the modern 20th century (e.g. modernity and rationality), signaling a return to the atavistic animosities of erstwhile days. Lucy Dawidowicz, for example, argues that the antisemitism of the Nazis was the bastard child of Christian anti-Judaism and that in modern Germany “the mass psychosis of anti-Semitism deranged a whole people. According to their system of beliefs elimination of the Jews resembled medieval exorcism of the Devil.” *The War Against the Jews*, 210. Likewise, Tom Lawson describes how intentionalists tended to see the Final Solution “as a hangover from a more barbaric past.” *Debates on the Holocaust*, 143.

In *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen offered his own incendiary variation of the intentionalist approach, purporting that an “eliminationist anti-Semitic German political culture” was the “prime mover” undergirding the participation of both the Nazi leadership and ordinary Germans in the persecution and extermination of the Jews.⁶² Goldhagen insisted that this “demonological antisemitism” was the one explanation that is “adequate” and contended that hatred of Jews “was the common structure of the perpetrators’ cognition and of German society in general.”⁶³ Goldhagen’s thesis essentially rejected any explanations of the Final Solution that were redolent of universal dimensions (for example, obedience to authority, blind bureaucracy, peer pressures, self-interest, duress, intimidation under a totalitarian regime etc.).⁶⁴ Instead, he contended that the Holocaust was the culmination of centuries of *uniquely German* Jew-hatred. In the 19th and early 20th century, long before the Nazis’ ascension to power, Goldhagen described how this specifically German obsession with the elimination of the Jews and Jewish influence was the culturally accepted norm in Germany.⁶⁵ He imagined that venomous hatred

⁶² Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Abacus Books, 1997), 455

⁶³ *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 392. One of the most problematic aspects of Goldhagen’s conclusions is well-summarized by Gavriel Rosenfeld. “By accepting the simplest of all imaginable explanations of the Holocaust...one no longer needs to grapple further with its most unfathomable dimensions.” In “The Controversy that Isn’t: The Debate over Daniel J. Goldhagen’s *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in Comparative Perspective,” *Contemporary European History*, 8:2, (1999) 271. Goldhagen makes the ambiguous claim that after 1945, Germans have been “re-educated” and have effectively deracinated the antisemitism once so deeply embedded in their culture. He says “This antisemitism...has dissipated after the war because of the changed historical and political context. For fifty years now, Germany has been a solid democracy, teaching its new generations new beliefs and values. With re-education and generational replacement, Germany, in many respects and particularly with regard to Jews, has remade itself. Germany is the great success story of the post-war era.” Goldhagen, The “*Willing Executioners*”/“*Ordinary Men*” Debate,” 2. Such painfully simplistic conclusions sever contemporary Germans and others from needing to fear that their generation is capable of repeating such crimes again, precluding any obligation to probe any deeper into the disconcerting ramifications of the Holocaust.

⁶⁴ A number of these more universal factors were advocated by Christopher Browning in his study, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York; Harperperennial, 1992). While Browning contended that the motives of the reserve police battalion that killed Jews in Poland stemmed largely from peer pressure, dynamics of group solidarity, desire for career promotions and obedience to authority, Goldhagen rejected these dynamics and argued that Germany itself spawned an “extraordinary, lethal political culture.” *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 456.

⁶⁵ While *Hitler's Willing Executioners* attempted to explain the motivations and causes behind the Holocaust, Goldhagen’s newer work, *A Moral Reckoning*, shifts the focus to issues of moral culpability and human agency in the Holocaust, particularly focusing on the moral responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church. Goldhagen claims that a steady diet of 1900 years of Christian antipathy towards the Jewish people and Judaism laid the seedbed for Nazi antisemitism and was sufficient to salve the consciences of ordinary Germans toward the persecution of the Jews, enabling them to envision that, in eliminating Jews, they were performing a beneficial and noble task for Germans and

of all things Jewish was so pervasive among the majority of “ordinary Germans” that the eliminationist ideology of Hitler and the Nazi regime was merely “a variation of the pre-existing dominant cultural theme.”⁶⁶ This led to Goldhagen’s allegation that German perpetrators who themselves murdered Jews or who facilitated their destruction did so *willingly* and without moral qualms, because they shared a lethal Hitlerian conception of Jews and believed their extermination to be just and necessary.⁶⁷

In contrast to intentionalism, which gave primacy to the ideology and the intentions of perpetrators, functionalism (also called structuralism) stressed that policies and decisions within the Nazi regime were driven predominantly by local pressures and practical considerations. Functionalists tended to emphasize the revolutionary nature of the Nazi State, its internal political rivalries, constant improvisations, and the chaotic decision-making that took place in response to changing, war-torn circumstances.

Therefore, functionalists assumed a much weaker connection between the three phenomena of antisemitism, the Holocaust, and National Socialism.

ultimately for all of humankind. Goldhagen says “Christianity is a religion that consecrated at its core and historically, spread throughout its domain a megatherian hatred of one group of people: the Jews. It libelously deemed them, sometimes in its sacred texts and doctrine, to be Christ-killers, children of the devil, desecrators and defilers of all goodness, responsible for an enormous range of human calamities and suffering. This hatred—Christianity’s betrayal of its own essential and good moral principles—led Christians, over the course of almost two millennia, to commit many grave crimes and other injuries against Jews, including mass murder. The best-known and largest of these mass murders is the Holocaust.” Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 3.

⁶⁶ The “Willing Executioners”/“Ordinary Men” Debate: selections from the symposium of the United States Holocaust Research Institute, April 8, 1996, (pg. 5). Full text of the debate between Goldhagen and Browning available at: http://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Publication_OP_1996-01.pdf

⁶⁷ Indicative of Goldhagen’s focus on the role of a subterranean German tradition of antisemitism is this quote, which encapsulates the conclusion of his book: “Anti-Semitism moved many thousands of “ordinary” Germans...to slaughter Jews. Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of a totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany, and had been for decades, induced ordinary Germans to kill unarmed, defenseless Jewish men, women, and children by the thousands, systematically and without pity.” *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 9.

Goldhagen’s thesis sparked significant controversy and criticisms among historians for his radical and monocausal interpretation of the Holocaust and German history. See for example *Ein Volk von Mördern?: die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, Julius H. Schoeps, ed. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1996); *Unwilling Germans?: The Goldhagen Debate*, Robert R. Shandley, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Yisrael Gutman, “Goldhagen—His Critics and His Contribution,” in *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 329-364; Avraham Barkai, “German Historians Confront Goldhagen,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 295-328. Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York, Holt: 1998) and *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory and Nazism—Facing the German Past*, Geoff Eley ed. (University of Michigan: Ann Arbor: MI, 2000).

Antisemitic motivations were not seen as a vitally important, driving force within the National Socialist regime, nor as an explanation for the Final Solution that did justice to the intricacies of the historical dynamics. For example, Hans Mommsen argued that “The ‘thought’—that is, Hitler’s fanatical proclamations of racial antisemitism—could not suffice in itself to unleash the systematic extermination of the Jews.”⁶⁸ According to the functionalist view, the Final Solution was the outcome of an unplanned process of “cumulative radicalization”⁶⁹ and emerged not from simple antisemitic ideology or bureaucratic willpower,⁷⁰ but incrementally and piecemeal, as German expansionism and World War II generated both the need and opportunity for more radical measures and as Nazi officials reacted to the exigencies of their local contexts.⁷¹ Karl Schleunes typified the functionalist position, making a case that

⁶⁸ Hans Mommsen, “Hitler’s Position in the Nazi System,” in *From Weimar to Auschwitz: Essays on German History* (Princeton, NJ: Polity Press, 1991), 181.

⁶⁹ Hans Mommsen, “Cumulative Radicalisation and Progressive Self-Destruction as Structural Determinants of the Nazi Dictatorship,” in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75-87.

⁷⁰ Unlike intentionalists, functionalists typically rejected a Hitler-centric interpretation of history and saw Hitler as more of a weak dictator, with a limited role and influence within the Nazi regime. Mommsen, for example, utilized the phrase “weak dictator” and argued that there was no Führer order for the Final solution; Hitler was a charismatic figurehead who approved or endorsed ideas that came from below, but lacked the power to impose his own ideas downward. See “The Realization of the Unthinkable” In *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, Gerhard Hirschfeld ed. (Allen and Unwin: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1986). Ian Kershaw’s biographies of Hitler also described him as a “lazy dictator” who held absolute power, but lacked the focus or energy to utilize much of it. See *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998) and *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). Thus, functionalists were prone to revise what Kershaw calls “an unjustifiable overemphasis of the personal role of Hitler in orthodox historiography.” They emphasized a more “polycratic rule—a multidimensional power-structure, in which Hitler’s own authority was only one element (if a very important one).” *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretations*, 4th ed. (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2000), 74. Kershaw explains that functionalists “do not ignore or downplay Hitler’s importance. They merely seek to locate this importance within the framework of numerous additional pressures built into the governmental system. They start from the premise that the processes of cumulative and progressive radicalization in the Third Reich were so complex in themselves that it would be impossible to explain them without widening the focus away from Hitler’s personality and ideology, and without considering the Führer less in personality terms than in his functional role within a multi-dimensional (polycratic) system of rule.” *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 79.

⁷¹ Functionalists tended to point to the diversity and contradictions of Nazi policy toward the Jews in the early 1930s (e.g. attempts by Nazi leadership to solve the “Jewish question” through forced immigration and resettlement policies, such as the Madagascar Plan) as proof that Nazi Jewish policy was not initially genocidal. As Karl Schleunes observes, “When the Nazis came to power, they had no specific plans for a solution of a [particular] sort. They were certain only that a solution was necessary.” *The Twister Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews 1933–1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), viii. Exterminating the Jews emerged as a later desideratum amidst the exigencies of war, as the occupation of more territory made the previous policies of emigration and deportation less feasible and the war provided the cover and opportunity for mass murder. Kershaw describes this position saying, “The actual physical extermination of the Jews was not planned in advance, could at no time before 1941 be in any realistic sense envisaged or predicted,

there was “a twisted road to Auschwitz” and that the paths that led to the death camps “were by no means direct or, for that matter, charted far in advance.”⁷²

In the 1990s, the contentious debate between functionalists and intentionalists which had dominated the 1970s and 1980s evolved into a more moderate synthesis. Scholars discovered that these two approaches were not as irreconcilable as previously conceived and that neither the functionalist nor intentionalist paradigm could adequately capture the complexity of the historical evidence. Kershaw describes the way this debate has been transcended saying,

More recent studies have seen no need to pose a sharp contradiction between the instrumentalization of ideas and the genuine motivational force of an ideology of racial purity and racial conquest which underpinned the regime’s ceaseless dynamic.⁷³

Likewise, Peter Longerich explains how the ground between classical functionalist and intentionalist positions has narrowed significantly in recent years:

The more research develops and is intensified, the more obvious it becomes that oppositional pairings such as intention and function, centre and periphery, rationality and ideology, situation or disposition are not mutually exclusive but illuminate varying aspects of historical reality in complementary, even interdependent ways.⁷⁴

and emerged itself as an ad hoc ‘solution’ to massive, and self-induced, administrative problems of the regime.” Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 239.

⁷² Schleunes, *The Twister Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews 1933-1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 257. Likewise, Uwe Adams, another pioneer of the functionalist school, argued that Nazi Jewish policy stemmed from the Nazis’ polycratic structure and reflected a complex amalgamation of competing interests. *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1972). Martin Broszat contended that the Final Solution emerged “bit by bit” as a result of the initiatives of local Nazi officials instead of from a single Hitlerian order. (In Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust In History*, Toronto: KeyPorter 2000,) 41. The extermination of the Jews, Broszat asserts, “began not solely as the result of an ostensible will for extermination but also as a ‘way out’ of a blind alley into which the Nazis had maneuvered themselves.” “Hitler and the Genesis of the ‘Final Solution: An Assessment of David Irving’s Theses” in *Aspects of the Third Reich*, H.W. Koch ed. (London: Macmillian, 1985), 393. In a similar vein, Omer Bartov describes the Final Solution as “the result of a specific juncture of circumstances and conditions during the war, combined with the structure of the state and the regime as they evolved during the prewar years.” Omer Bartov, “Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Reinterpretation of National Socialism,” in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, The Unknown, The Disputed, and The Reexamined*, Berenbaum and Peck eds. (Indiana University Press, 1998), 86.

⁷³ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 264-265.

⁷⁴ Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 3. Burleigh and Wippermann also describe the coalescence between functionalism and intentionalism saying, “Both positions in the debate have a number of merits and demerits; both ultimately reflect different forms of historical explanation; and the ground between them is steadily narrowing in favour of a consensus which borrows elements from both lines of argument.” *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge:

“Moderate functionalism,” is one way to describe this attempt to synthesize the strengths and redress the shortcomings of both functionalist and intentionalist approaches. This more temperate position recognizes that beliefs and ideas themselves are powerful forces, but they are not cultivated in an ideological vacuum, hermetically sealed from their distinctive social and political context. Christopher Browning explains how the moderate functionalist paradigm reconciles the sharp polarities evident in the initial debate.

This consensus view sees Hitler as a key legitimizing and frequently decisive figure but not a micro-manager, ideology as providing direction but not a concrete blueprint of action, antisemitism as but one among a number of driving motives, and a wide array of participants as engaged in an interactive process of initiation and response from both above and below.⁷⁵

Cambridge University Press, 1991), 96. Dan Stone contends that “There are now very few historians who would take either an extreme intentionalist or an extreme functionalist position, since most now recognize both that before 1941 or 1942 there was no clearly formulated blueprint for genocide and that a worldview built on mystical race thinking, especially anti-Semitism, lay at the heart of the regime.” “The Holocaust and its Historiography,” in *The Historiography of Genocide*, Dan Stone, ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 377. Tom Lawson says, “A diverse historical phenomena requires a diverse explanation and it is an emphasis on context and complexity which has sought to replace essentialist explanations of the Holocaust. The new historiography of the Holocaust, despite disagreements over detail, suggests that the ‘Final Solution’ emerged from the ashes of many of the utopian dreams of the Third Reich.” *Debates on the Holocaust*, 182.

⁷⁵ Browning, “Problem Solvers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, 129. Browning describes his moderate functionalist position saying that “While antisemitism was clearly central to Hitler’s ideology, the intention of systematically murdering the European Jews was not fixed in his mind before the war, but crystallized in 1941 after previous solutions proved unworkable and the immanent attack on the Soviet Union raised the prospect of yet another vast increase in the number of Jews within the growing Nazi empire.” Thus, Browning says the Final Solution was not a part of a long, premeditated plan but “rather emerged in the particular circumstances of 1941.” “The Decision-Making Process” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Dan Stone ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 178. See also “Beyond ‘Intentionalism’ and ‘Functionalism’: The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered,” in *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86-121; and *Fateful Months: On the Emergence of the Final Solution* (Holmes & Meier, 1991), 8-38. Saul Friedländer also seems to represent a moderate functionalist view saying, “The crimes committed by the Nazi regime were neither a mere outcome of some haphazard, involuntary, imperceptible, and chaotic onrush of unrelated events nor a predetermined enactment of a demonic script; they were the result of converging factors, of the interaction between intentions and contingencies, between discernible causes and chance. General ideological objectives and tactical policy decisions enhanced one another and always remained open to more radical moves as circumstances changed.” See *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 5. For more recent works reflective of a moderate functionalist position see Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale University Press, 2001); Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Michael Marrus *The Holocaust in History* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000); and Ulrich Herbert, “Extermination Policy: New Answers and Questions about the History of the ‘Holocaust’ in German Historiography”, in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, U. Herbert, ed. (Oxford: Berghahn, 2000).

Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman portray the complex relationship between perpetrators and contextual variables with the term “intentional functionalism,” contending that even though the ideological foundation of antisemitism was present since before the Nazis came to power, a number of specific, historically contingent features were necessary to activate and maximize the forces that produced the Holocaust.⁷⁶

Richard Bessel describes the outcome of these more tempered approaches for the current state of the historiography as

A much better informed, much more detailed and more nuanced picture of the Nazi regime and most serious historians of the Nazi regime now are to some extent both "intentionalists" and "functionalists"- in so far as those terms still can be used at all.⁷⁷

The new historiographies of the Holocaust,⁷⁸ while possessing great diversity, tend to replace essentialist, monocausal approaches with explanatory narratives that recognize the Final Solution as a multivalent and extremely complex historical phenomena. Contemporary historians now favor a more diverse, textured explanation and give greater attention to regional and local dynamics than to proffering universal, one-size-fits-all explanations.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (University of California Press, 2002) 213.

⁷⁷ Richard Bessel, “Functionalists vs. Intentionalists: The Debate Twenty Years on or Whatever Happened to Functionalism and Intentionalism?” in *German Studies Review*, vol. 26:1 (2003), 16.

⁷⁸ A more moderate functionalist perspective is evident in these significant works produced by a younger generation of German scholars who have conducted detailed regional studies of the killing fields of Eastern Europe: Dieter Pohl, *Von der “Judenpolitik” zum Judenmord: der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements, 1939-1944* (Frankfurt am Main: New York: P. Lang, 1993) and “Hans Krüger and the Murder of the Jews in the Stanislawow Region (Galicia),” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 239-264; Thomas Sandkühler, “‘Endlösung’ in Galizien: der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941-1944 (Bon: Dietz, 1996); Christian Gerlach “The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews and Hitler’s Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews,” *Journal of Modern History* 70:4 (1998): 759-812.

⁷⁹ Stephen R. Welch identifies and delineates five major interpretive paradigms currently shaping the field of Holocaust studies. In addition to the functionalist, intentionalist, and moderate functionalist paradigms outlined here, Welch explores two additional paradigm which he calls the “pathology of modernity” and “genocide.” The former, emerging in the 1980s, argues that the Holocaust was “not the outcome of German peculiarity or deep-seated antisemitism but rather the result of the totalitarian potential of modernization.” (“A Survey of Interpretive Paradigms,” 5). Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust* represents this position vividly as Bauman sees the Holocaust burgeoning from modernity itself, and not simply from impulses extant within the Third Reich; thus, the Holocaust is not simply a Jewish problem, but was also shaped by and executed using, “the

While initially I approached this work with an intentionalist framework, viewing the Third Reich and the Holocaust primarily through the lens of ideology, I found this paradigm to be ultimately lacking in explanatory power. By themselves, antisemitism and a rejection of the Other are insufficient to explain the origins of the Holocaust, nor other instances of genocide and mass murder.⁸⁰ While intentionalists rightly draw attention to the critical role that ideology played in the destruction of Jews and other victims in the Nazi regime, they fail to probe deeper into the practical and contextual factors through which the humanity of the Other could subtly become eclipsed. More contemporary approaches to Holocaust historiography such as moderate functionalism bring to light that the destruction of Jews and other victims was motivated by a significant number of both ideological and situational factors and executed with technological and bureaucratic sophistication by the Nazi state. In order to understand today how the Other could become vulnerable and ultimately expendable under the Nazi regime, it is critical to accentuate both the dangers of ideology, as well as the considerable economic and political pressures which allowed

powerful instruments of rational and effective action that modern development itself brought into being.” Thus, for Bauman, the Holocaust is “the truth of modernity.” (*Modernity and the Holocaust*, x, xiv, 6). Welch highlights a common element of pathologies of modernity in that they tend to deemphasize the unique Jewish nature of the Holocaust, antisemitism, and the specific context of German history and steer attention toward the Holocaust as “a pathological outcome of the crisis-ridden process of modernization” thus highlighting the potential for mass murder that is latent within all modern societies. (“A Survey of Interpretive Paradigms,” 22).

Under Welch’s fifth paradigm of genocide, the Holocaust is contextualized and contrasted to other instances of genocidal violence. Welch says, “The Holocaust’s uniqueness is challenged, and it is generally argued that it was not qualitatively different from other examples of mass killing in human history. Regarding the Holocaust as a sub-category of a broader ‘generic’ type of genocide deflates the importance of antisemitism and encourages explanatory schemes which favor more universal factors.” Stephen Welch “A Survey of Interpretive Paradigms in Holocaust Studies and a Comment on the Dimensions of the Holocaust,” Yale Center for International and Area Studies, Working Paper, no. GS17 (New Haven, CT, 2001). For a similar summary of approaches and paradigms see: Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship,” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13 (1999): 28-61.

⁸⁰ While classical intentionalism focuses primarily on antisemitic ideology as spawning the Holocaust, I widen this focus to examine a rejection of otherness as a significant and pervasive pattern in the historical narrative. Furthermore, while I agree that antipathy towards Jews long-predated the Nazi regime’s rise to power in Germany, I disagree with the contention which intentionalists such as Daniel Goldhagen make that German antisemitism was something unique or *sui generis*. Goldhagen argues that his eliminationist antisemitism was so pervasive and pernicious in 19th and 20th century Germany that the nation had “a radically different culture,” was not “normal” and thus, should not be seen as “more or less like us.” Instead, says Goldhagen, the German cultural ethos should be investigated and analyzed in the same way as “an anthropologist, disembarking on unknown shores” would examine an exotic foreign people. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 15, 27. Throughout this work, I consistently emphasize that a rejection of otherness is a *universal human tendency*, and not a uniquely German one.

the Other to ultimately be identified as outside the bounds of moral obligation. My work is guided by the contention that the human aversion towards otherness is *not necessarily* connected to beliefs and intentions; therefore, it is imperative that we are able to identify and to contend against the structures within the church and within society that exacerbate the vulnerability of the Other. A purely intentionalist interpretation of the Holocaust, while attractive in its simplicity, is perilous for our self-conceptions as human beings. It can lead to the belief that without an overt hatred for the Other, we are essentially safe from the potential to participate in genocide and other acts which are averse towards otherness.

My critique of Christian individuals and institutions under the Third Reich is not intended to demonize the church unfairly, nor to appear insensitive to the considerable pressures which individuals and institutions faced and the multitude of claims that vied for their loyalty. While I highlight ways that Christians and churches have often been at the forefront of rejecting the Other and the destructive potential of this tendency, I wish to be clear that a rejection of otherness is not a specifically *Christian* impulse, but rather a deeply engrained *human* proclivity. My purpose here is not to suggest that Christianity has a unique predilection for rejecting the Other, but to inquire about the specific resources within Christian theology that might enable communities to contend against this impulse. I write as one who dearly loves the church and believes, in spite of its shortcomings, that contemporary churches have great potential and promise to reckon against this impulse and to function as moral communities that participate in the reconciling work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, I am not claiming that all Christian people and churches, as a rule, consciously rejected the Other during the reign of Third Reich. Under such extreme conditions, normal, private concerns consumed such energy and attention that perhaps the Other simply became invisible to many. The historical narrative of the churches under Hitler should not be equated with a simplistic intentionalist account where actions were intentionally chosen on the basis of beliefs. While I maintain that a rejection of otherness is common denominator of genocidal violence, this can range from a blatant ideology of antipathy to a more subtle and perhaps unconscious disengagement. To reject the Other is instinctive and often results from ignorance,

blindness, and ostensibly benign motivations for self-preservation and survival. Thus, in order for the Other to become vulnerable, no conscious ideological “intention” is necessary.

C. Practical Theology/Ecclesiology

It is important to note that this work is primarily theological, rather than historical in nature. While my research is greatly influenced by and informed from the historiography of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, I do not intend to contribute to nor significantly challenge these historiographies, but instead to reflect theologically on their import for contemporary Christian self-conceptions. One of the limitations of situating the work within the fields of practical theology and ecclesiology is that many dimensions and debates within the historiography will lack the nuance and texture that a more historical piece of research would afford. I argue that certain aspects of the historiography of the Third Reich, as well as trends within post-Holocaust theology, provide insight for theological reflection on the propensity to reject otherness, which is considerably urgent for ecclesiology today.

In locating the thesis within the realm of practical theology, I aim to offer some constructive proposals in light of the propensity to reject the Other, which I argue is a significant dynamic within the narrative of the churches under the Third Reich as well as in post-Holocaust ecclesial statements and theology. By “practical” I mean that the work might be utilized as a pedagogical resource for Christian communities as they grapple with some complexities of encountering otherness. While the final chapter is geared towards being most constructive, the entire work is meant to offer practical contributions. More specifically, the work aims to offer first, a resource which might educate congregations about the deleterious nature of otherness, portraying why they should be cognizant of their own susceptibility to reject the Other and how this propensity can debilitate the prophetic, moral witness of the church. Through fostering awareness of these issues and their urgency, the work invites ecclesial communities to place theological reflection on otherness at the forefront of their agenda and beckons cooperative discernment regarding the difficulties of encountering the Other within their *Sitz im Leben*. Second, through an

analysis of ecclesial statements and the work of post-Holocaust theologians, the work delineates some common and subtle pitfalls that many who are engaged in Jewish-Christian relations (and more broadly in inter-religious dialogue) can easily fall prey to. This critique offers a guide for congregations about the ways in which their own conceptions of and approaches to the Other might emulate these problematic tendencies and illustrates the need for sensitivity as congregations develop resources and methodologies to confront these challenges together. Third, the study offers instruction about the significant role that identity plays in the process of making space for otherness and suggests some resources within Christian theology that can be utilized toward this end. It is hoped that this information might facilitate individuals and communities to both evaluate how their own identities may be formed negatively over and against the Other, and to develop programs and educational resources which might assist in creating safe spaces for the cultivation of multidimensional identities. Fourth and finally, the work describes a few specific practices that offer a starting point for churches to live with and learn from the Other in a more purposeful and healthy way. In order to illustrate how these concrete embodied practices might take shape, I describe Volf's drama of embrace, which could serve as a pedagogical model for ecclesial communities seeking to cultivate more authentic encounters with otherness in their own contexts. Likewise, the conceptual tool of the universe of moral obligation is meant to facilitate discussions and discernment about how various boundaries of ethical responsibilities are envisioned and constructed vis-à-vis the Other.

The underlying question guiding this work is how Christian churches might authentically live out their calling in the midst of a world deeply riven by a rejection of otherness. The answer to this query does not originate merely in the exigencies of societal or ecclesiastical institutions but rather must spring forth from the witness and character of God's will for human beings as we see manifested in Scripture, and most clearly in Jesus Christ. It will be helpful to describe briefly where I am placing church in the context of this discussion.

In speaking of "church" I mean church (*ecclesia*) in the very broadest sense of the word, those gathered for the purpose of worship and service to God, encompassing both large institutional ecclesial bodies in addition to smaller, more

informal Christian groups which self-designate as “church.” Guiding my ecclesial conceptions is *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* which says,

The Church is not the sum of individual believers in communion with God. It is not primarily a communion of believers with each other. It is their common partaking in God’s own life whose innermost being is communion. Thus it is a divine and human reality⁸¹

A guiding contention of this work is that any kind of authentic, theological response to the Holocaust must be practical in nature, resulting in the transformation of concrete practices and not merely in theoretical or theological revisions. Sidney Hall confirms this belief, “After the Holocaust, a credible Christian theology must begin in and result in a practical, lived theology.”⁸² Thus, ecclesiology is not merely a theoretical discipline but is inescapably historical, contextual, and practical.⁸³ While a large part of the work here is descriptive and critical, the work ultimately aims to focus on non-theoretical practical implications for the church that come to light through the intersection of Holocaust theology and a reflection on otherness. Thus, my concern here will not be with a theory or model of church,⁸⁴ nor with

⁸¹ “The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A stage on the Way to a Common Statement.” *Faith and Order Paper* No. 181, November 1998, § 10.

⁸² Quoted in *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*, Carol Rittner and Stephen D. Smith et al eds. (Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2000), 182.

⁸³ My own understanding of the task of theology aligns with Miroslav Volf’s definition. “Theology is an (academic) enterprise whose object of study is God and God’s relation to the world and whose purpose is not simply to deliver ‘knowledge,’ but to serve a way of life...At the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within the pursuit of this way of life.” In *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practice in Christian Life*, Volf and Bass eds., 247.

⁸⁴ The departure from ecclesial models was highly influenced by reflections from within the emerging movement of concrete ecclesiology, which eschews theoretical conceptions of church and the tendency to reduce ecclesiology to an ideal, abstract model, purported to be universally applicable at all times and places. (Nicholas Healy calls such models “blueprint ecclesiology”.) Rather, ecclesiology should be deeply grounded in the experiences and practices of the local church. Concrete ecclesiology makes the ordinary, broken experiences of the concrete church the subject of theological attention, and contends that social sciences (ethnography) are a significant resource in this undertaking. A classic example of “blueprint ecclesiology” might be Avery Dulles’ *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976). For Healy’s discussion and analysis of these kinds of ecclesiologies, see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25-51. Healy writes, “While the ecclesiology of the last hundred years or so has been sometimes profound, and its impact upon the church sometimes also profound, it has not been as helpful as it could be for the Christian community....in general ecclesiology in our period has been highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than oriented to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is” (3).

individualistic Christian ethics per se, but rather with the embodied practices taking place within the context of the local Christian community.

Swinton and Mowat define practical theology as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the Triune God.”⁸⁵ They assert that one of chief objectives of the practical theologian is to “ensure that the practices of the Church remain faithful to the practices and mission of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his continuing redemptive practices.”⁸⁶

In reflecting upon ecclesiology in a world saturated with otherness, it will be helpful to describe the framework and definitions that are influential in my understanding of the nature and mission of the church. I will briefly outline the primary ecclesiological tradition and imagery of the church that underpin my conceptions of ecclesiology.

Most influential here are reflections taking place within the ecumenical movement (primarily within World Council of Churches constituencies and related ecumenical venues such as the Faith and Order movement). While in no way a unified or homogenous body, I have chosen to situate my overarching conceptions of church within this tradition since it represents significantly more diversity of voices than within any other individual Christian tradition. Within ecumenical ecclesiology the concepts of unity and diversity, communion, reconciliation, and *koinonia* (to

⁸⁵ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 25. Gerben Heitink offers a similar but helpful definition of practical theology as the “empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.” *Practical Theology: History, theory and Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 6.

⁸⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 24. Richard Osmer delineates the four core tasks of the practical theologian. First is the descriptive-empirical task of “Priestly Listening” which seeks to discern *what* is going on by gathering information. This data enables the practical theologian to detect patterns and dynamics and then carefully situate these patterns within a larger narrative framework. Second, is the interpretative task of “Sagely Wisdom” which searches for reasons for the phenomena observed in the descriptive/empirical phase, asking “why is this going on?”⁸⁶ The three crucial ingredients of sagely wisdom are thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment. Here, theories and practices from other disciplines are utilized to grasp more clearly *why* these patterns and dynamics are taking place. Third, “what ought to be going on?” is asked, which is a task Osmer calls “Prophetic Discernment.” This calls for an interplay between theological interpretation, ethical norms and reflection on “good practice” in order to glean wisdom about God’s word for the contemporary context. Fourth, the pragmatic task asks “How might we respond?” and suggests constructive strategies for guiding toward the desired end. See Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008)

name but a few) offer substantial resources for churches to potentially move towards the Other in a posture of embrace.

There is within the ecumenical movement a commitment to unity, not to be confused with unity in the sense of totalizing conformity or uniformity. Rather the ecumenical movement's desideratum is what Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen describes as "unity-in-diversity."⁸⁷ The commitment to unity is expressed early in WCC documents, for example the 1961 statement at New Dehli states,

The love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit is the source and goal of the unity which the Triune God wills for all men and creation...The reality of this unity was manifest at Pentecost in the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom we know in this present age the first fruits of that perfect union of the Son with his Father, which will be known in its fullness only when all things are consummated by Christ in his glory. The Lord who is bringing all things into full unity at the last is he who constrains us to seek the unity which he wills for his Church on earth here and now.⁸⁸

Here we see unity is not grounded in human efforts or ingenuity, but rather unity is envisioned as a gift and a work of the Triune God. Thus, "It is not the task of the ecumenical movement—or any human organization for that matter—to create unity between churches, but rather to give form to the unity already created by God."⁸⁹ While Kärkkäinen says there is no consensus on the exact nature of unity, the Christians churches have a common foundation in that all want the basis of ecclesial unity to be rooted in the unity of the Triune God, as well as in the apostolic tradition which is preserved in Scripture and the creeds.⁹⁰

The 2005 Faith and Order paper, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, recognizes that "Diversity in unity and unity in diversity are gifts of God to the Church."⁹¹ It declares,

⁸⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 16.

⁸⁸ From <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1961-new-delhi/new-delhi-statement-on-unity>.

⁸⁹ Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 85.

⁹⁰ Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 84. For a brief account of different perceptions of the unity of the Church see pgs. 81-84. With the exception of the so-called free churches, almost all other churches envision visible unity among the churches to be the "ecumenical imperative."

⁹¹ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 60.

Authentic diversity in the life of communion must not be stifled: authentic unity must not be surrendered. Each local church must be the place where two things are simultaneously guaranteed: the safeguarding of unity and the flourishing of a legitimate diversity.⁹²

In tandem with the notion of unity-in-diversity are the significant concepts of communion and reconciliation:

The Church exists for the glory and praise of God, to serve the reconciliation of humankind, in obedience to the command of Christ. It is the will of God that the communion in Christ, which is realised in the Church, should embrace the whole creation... The Church, as communion, is instrumental to God's ultimate purpose.⁹³

The Nature and Mission of the Church text is careful to stress that communion is a gift in Christ which is "only partially realized," as humanity continues to struggle with the breached relationships caused by sin. Yet, even in the midst of this struggle, the document affirms "there is a genuine enjoyment of new life here and now and a confident anticipation of sharing in the fullness of communion in the life to come."⁹⁴

Connected to unity and communion, another prominent theme in the ecclesiologies of the ecumenical movement has been *koinonia*.⁹⁵ The biblical notion of *koinonia*, which has become central in the ecumenical movement's quest for a common understanding of the nature of the Church, is understood as the gift of Christ that the church shares freely with the world, a gift that is both already, and not yet.⁹⁶ This concept of *koinonia* is not simply a function or task of the church, but

⁹² *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 62. Likewise, the *Porvoo Common Statement* between Lutherans and Anglicans says, "Unity in Christ does not exist despite and in opposition to diversity, but is given with and in diversity". Because this diversity corresponds with the many gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church, it is a concept of fundamental ecclesial importance, with relevance to all aspects of the life of the Church, and is not a mere concession to theological pluralism. Both the unity and the diversity of the Church are ultimately grounded in the communion of God the Holy Trinity."

⁹³ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 33.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 59.

⁹⁵ Kärkkäinen notes that the specific paradigm of *koinonia* is one of the few orientations most Christian churches have gladly embraced in recent years, from the Orthodox, to the Roman Catholic, to the Lutheran and other Protestant churches, to even some of the Free churches." *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 86-87.

⁹⁶ *Koinonia* and its synonyms: sharing, community, participation, and communion denote that the church is a communion in the Spirit, since it is the Spirit of Christ that unites all Christians together in fellowship. Kärkkäinen says, "If the church is the church of Christ, and since there is only one Christ, then unity belongs to the nature of the church." *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 79. For an excellent report on *koinonia* and its implications see "Costly Unity" Ronde, Denmark, February 1993 in

rather describes its very essence. While the primary agenda and goal of the ecumenical movement is to promote unity or *koinonia* amongst Christians and Christian churches, a number of key texts point to the church's role as reconciling agents of *koinonia* beyond the bounds of the church as well. Thus, Kärkkäinen says that in its fullest meaning the term "ecumenism" refers not only to the relationships between the churches but also between religions and finally to the unity of all humankind under one God."⁹⁷

The text for the Santiago Faith and Order world conference articulated this position,

The church as *koinonia* is called to share not only in the suffering of its own community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized; by joining in all efforts for justice and peace within human societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation and keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. In so doing it shows its vocation to invite all people to respond in faith to God's love. *Diakonia* to the whole world and *koinonia* cannot be separated.⁹⁸

The WCC text *Called to be the One Church*, adopted in 2006, says,

The grace of God is expressed in the victory over sin given by Christ, and in the healing and wholeness of the human being. The kingdom of God can be perceived in a reconciled and reconciling community called to holiness: a community that strives to overcome the discriminations expressed in sinful social structures, and to work for the healing of divisions in its own life and for healing and unity in the human community. The Church participates in the reconciling ministry of Christ, who emptied himself, when it lives out its mission, affirming and renewing the image of God in all humanity and working alongside all those whose human dignity has been denied by economic, political, and social marginalisation.⁹⁹

Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church. Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds. (Geneva, Switzerland, WCC Publications, 1997), 2-23. Also, a significant contribution to the understanding of *koinonia* and ecclesiology emerged from the Canberra Assembly (1991) in the statement "The Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling."

⁹⁷ *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 80.

⁹⁸ Quoted in *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra eds. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 3.

⁹⁹ From *Called to be the One Church: An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue*, § IV.10. Likewise § IV.11 says, "The Church in its mission expresses its calling to proclaim the Gospel and to offer the living Christ to the whole creation. The churches find themselves living alongside people of other living faiths and ideologies. As an instrument of God, who is sovereign over the whole creation, the Church is called to engage in dialogue and collaboration with them so that its *mission* brings about the good of all creatures and the well-being of the earth. All churches are called to struggle against sin in all its manifestations, within

Likewise, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* describes the church as the “creature of God’s Word and of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God, is God’s gift and cannot exist by and for itself.”¹⁰⁰ It continues,

As Christ’s mission encompassed the preaching of the Word of God and the commitment to care for those suffering and in need, so the apostolic Church in its mission from the beginning combined preaching of the Word, the call to repentance, faith, baptism and diakonia. This the Church understands as an essential dimension of its identity. The Church in this way signifies, participates in, and anticipates the new humanity God wants.¹⁰¹

While wary of the risks of oversimplification amidst a very diverse and fluid movement, as well as the still-to-be-realized nature of ecumenical unity, this brief sampling of reflections from within ecumenical ecclesiology highlights the potentiality of key theological concepts such as unity-in-diversity, communion, reconciliation, and *koinonia* to function as significant resources for Christian churches in the endeavor to resist the penchant to reject otherness—both inter-ecclesially and extra-ecclesially. I believe, if broadened beyond inter-ecclesiality, the concepts of unity-in-diversity, communion, reconciliation, and *koinonia* offer a promising platform upon which to grapple with the problem of otherness.

This work is also rooted in reflections on the church as the image of the Trinity, which is intimately related to the concepts of unity and *koinonia*. As a fundamental aspect of Christian consensus and unity, the Trinity contains

and around them, and to work with others to combat injustice, alleviate human suffering, overcome violence, and ensure fullness of life for all people.” *Called to be the One Church*, adopted 23 February 2006. An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue, §IV.11.

¹⁰⁰ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 9.

¹⁰¹ See § 38. The statement continues, “The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. This entails critically analysing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation. The Church is called to proclaim the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, by its works of compassion and mercy (cf. Lk.4:18-19). This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God’s instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (cf. 2Cor. 5:18-21). It is also called, together with all people of goodwill, to care for the integrity of creation in addressing the abuse and destruction of God’s creation, and to participate in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity” (§ 40).

tremendous resources for cultivating practices of protecting unity-in-diversity. John Zizioulas confirms,

There is no other model for the proper relation between communion and otherness either for the Church or for the human being than the Trinitarian God. If the Church wants to be faithful to her true self, she must try to mirror the communion and otherness that exists in the Triune God. The same is true of the human being as the 'image of God.'¹⁰²

God as a Trinity of three persons in *perichoresis* (an eternal, continual dance with Godself) reveals that communion is not a threat to otherness but actually generates otherness. As Trinity, God is the quintessential shared life—a relational being *by definition*. A solitary God would not be *koinonia* in essence, but isolation. God as Triune perfection is not closed off to the world, but is rather, as Andrei Rublev's famous icon on the Trinity portrays, an "eternal circle of love which opens to the hospitality of the creature, leading it to the eternal Trinitarian Banquet."¹⁰³

Trinitarian ecclesiology provides a significant foundation for a theology of authentic communion amidst multiplicity.¹⁰⁴ The Triune God is thus the model and ontological grounding for unity amidst otherness, casting light on the very identity

¹⁰² Zizioulas *Communion and Otherness*, 4-5. Zizioulas claims that there are three things we can learn from a study of the doctrine of the Trinity. First, otherness is constitutive of unity. He says "Otherness is constitutive of unity. God is not first one and then three, but simultaneously one and three." Thus otherness is not an addendum to the Trinitarian life but inherent in it. Second, Zizioulas says a study of God as Triune reveals that "otherness is *absolute*." Each person of the Trinity is distinct, none being subject to confusion with the other two. Thirdly, and most important, "otherness is not moral or psychological but ontological." This means each member of the Trinity is distinct, not because of natural qualities (such qualities are common to all three persons) but, says Zizioulas, "because of the simple affirmation of being who he is." *Communion and Otherness*, 5.

Likewise, Miroslav Volf casts a vision of the church as an image of the Trinity, arguing that a proper relation between communion and otherness must be rooted in the communion and otherness that exists in the Triune God. Volf sees this communion in terms of *perichoresis* or a shared and interdependent life, as opposed to a hierarchical notion where the other two persons of the Trinity are subordinate to the Father. Miroslav Volf *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁰³ Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*, Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 12. Here, says Bobrinskoy, "The circle of the infinite tenderness of 'the Three' opens to welcome the viewer, whom the icons leads into sacred space, to communion at the Table of God, at the very heart of the hospitality of God to which man [sic], in turn, is invited and where, with fear and love, he enters into the intimacy of God." *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*, Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 141.

¹⁰⁴ See: John D. Zizioulas "The church as Communion: a Presentation on the World Conference Theme" in *On the Way to a Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993*. (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994), 104.

and mission of the church.¹⁰⁵ While certainly this ecclesial image has its weaknesses and care must be taken not to stretch the imagery too far, it is an extremely helpful grounding for our reflections on the purpose of the church as being called to move beyond barriers and make space for the Other within itself.¹⁰⁶

V. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

Bryon Sherwin writes, “Any word about the Holocaust is inadequate. But there is the paradox. The Holocaust imposes silence yet demands speech. It defies all solutions but calls for responses.”¹⁰⁷ Because the Holocaust is both emotionally charged and theologically significant, there is debate about whether or not it is appropriate at all to say that there are any lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.¹⁰⁸ In arguing that the Holocaust teaches us something about the deep-seated proclivities of Christian people and churches to reject the Other, I am not implying that these lessons could not have been learned otherwise and that the Holocaust was a necessary evil. The work here will demand a careful articulation of the relationship between the unique and universal dimensions of the Holocaust.

Emil Fackenheim admonishes against universalizing the Holocaust so as to “flatten it out into one case among many.”¹⁰⁹ Caution is needed so that the Holocaust

¹⁰⁵ Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger say, “The church has its existence in constitutive relation with God, its own, humanity and large, and the world. Moreover, the church exists to love God, its own, the world, and the whole of creation because it is loved in covenantal communion with God... The church participates in the communal God’s life as the Father goes forth into the world through the co-missional Son and Spirit to create and sustain a new humanity and community over whom and through whom God reigns, and in whose midst God dwells.” In *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Brazos Press, 2009), 20.

¹⁰⁶ Zizioulas says the concept of a God who exists as a communion of freely given love has tremendous implications for anthropology—for we as human beings are created in the image of this God. See Zizioulas *Communion and Otherness*, chapter four, “The Trinity and Personhood,” 155-177.

¹⁰⁷ Sherwin, “The Holocaust,” *Jewish Spectator* 34 (October 1969), 25.

¹⁰⁸ Elie Wiesel is adamant that the Holocaust is inexplicable and, because it transcends human understanding, cannot teach us any lessons about the cause of evil. (See Wiesel, “Art and Culture After the Holocaust,” *Cross Currents*, vol. 26:3 (1976), 265. This view risks turning the Holocaust into some sort of ineffable, enigmatic phenomenon which cannot be critically analyzed in any meaningful way and severs the historicity of the Holocaust from concrete time and space. Yehuda Bauer also admonishes those who say the Holocaust has no lessons to teach us saying “If we argue like that we may be guilty of transforming the murder of children into some sort of metaphysical gibberish we blasphemously call transcendence.” See “Explaining the Holocaust,” *History, Religion and Meaning: American Reflections on the Holocaust*, Julius Simon, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 4.

¹⁰⁹ The full quote reads “To universalize the Holocaust--flatten it out into one case among many, to link it with disasters and crimes no less great, perhaps, but within the parameters of 'human nature'--all

does not become merely another example of horrific inhumanity, an event which is described using only vague and general terms such as “crisis of civilization” or “paradigm of evil.”¹¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman helps bridge this tension between the universal and specific aspects of the Holocaust saying, “The possibility of the Holocaust was rooted in certain universal features of modern civilization: its implementation on the other hand, was connected with a specific and not at all universal relationship between state and society.”¹¹¹ Throughout the work, the balance between universal and unique features of the Holocaust must be carefully weighed.

Katharina von Kellenbach warns of the danger of codifying the meaning and complexity of the historical events of the Holocaust, saying there is a great temptation to envision its significance in terms that can be neatly grasped, categorized, analyzed, and then processed theologically. This attempt to level the totality of the historical events down into one coherent narrative which can be easily absorbed into cultural memory is highly problematic. She cautions,

The Holocaust should make us suspicious of any and all explanations and ideologies that conceal the Face of the individual Other. Any master narrative, including religious explanations that exclude, overlook and ignore the face of the littlest among us must be suspect. The study of the Holocaust must not lead into abstraction but into concreteness, the thickness of human suffering and evil.¹¹²

Cognizant of the pitfall of oversimplification and offering monocausal explanations amidst a multi-faceted historical context, I describe the tendency to reject otherness and an inability to place the Other within the universe of moral obligation as *a* pervasive pattern which merits critical attention, but it is certainly not the only one. It is a ubiquitous and often overlooked tendency that bears considerable

this is therefore to avoid precisely what ought to arrest philosophical thought. It is escapism-into-universalism, in the case of the Holocaust the most fashionable escapism of all." Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, xiii.

¹¹⁰ Hannah Holtschneider admonishes against this common tendency in *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Fundamental Theologische Studien 24, Lit. Verlag, Münster, 2001), 197.

¹¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 82.

¹¹² Kellenbach, “Future Directions for Christian Theology and Ethics After the Holocaust,” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, vol. 2, John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 656-657.

import for ecclesiology. While I wish to challenge theological and historical scholarship to look more deeply at the challenge of otherness for Christian churches, I do not want to imply that the churches under Hitler somehow had a patent on vilifying and rejecting the Other. Such a stance would be myopic towards the countless other instances, both past and present, where the deleterious effects of a rejection of otherness are clearly seen.

A concomitant pitfall that I am wary of lies in obfuscating the unique social, historical, and theological elements of antisemitism/anti-Judaism¹¹³ by situating these phenomena within a universal human aversion toward otherness. Christian anti-Judaism is a very complex phenomenon demanding “thick descriptions”¹¹⁴ that do justice to the economic, psychological, sociological, and political complexities. In his study of the Christian legacy of antisemitism, Robert Michael says,

Christian antisemitism alone did not cause the Holocaust; but when Christian antisemitism combined with Nazi ideology and modern technology, the resulting “perfect storm” of organized hate made the Holocaust predictable, if not inevitable. Not a necessary consequent of Christianity, the Holocaust was, nevertheless, in a momentous way, the result of the impact that centuries of Christian triumphalism (theology of glory) had on Christians and anti-ecclesiastical Christians.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ I will employ the spelling “antisemitism” rather than the erroneous “anti-Semitism” unless using quoted material. Anti-Semitism, coined by German journalist Wilhelm Marr in the 1870’s, is actually a misnomer in that it does not signify prejudice towards all those who speak Semitic languages, nor does it imply discrimination against all so-called Semitic peoples. The hyphenated form thus serves to validate the term “Semite,” as a reified and ontological reality which was utilized to ostracize Jews as a separate (and inferior) race of human beings. See Shmuel Almog, “What’s in a Hyphen?” *SICSA Report: Newsletter of the Vidal Sassoon International Center of Antisemitism* 2 (1989).

Rather, antisemitism in its broadest usage describes a hatred towards anything and everything Jewish. Many scholars attempt to distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Judaism by linking anti-Judaism with the inception of Christianity and antisemitism with modern pseudo-scientific, racial theories. Padraic O’Hare explains this distinction saying, “Antisemitism is hateful; anti-Judaism is a matter of sincere conviction and as such is not an expression of hate, though it is a cause of contemptuousness based on, among other factors, stereotypes” (See *The Enduring Covenant*, T&T Clark, 9). By employing the former term, antisemites could distinguish themselves from traditional hatred of Jews and thus claim to be entirely free of religious prejudice. My use of the terms antisemitism and anti-Judaism interchangeably throughout this work stems from the premise that prejudicial thoughts and actions are pernicious whether they spring from racism or religious convictions.

¹¹⁴ See Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward An Interpretive Theory of Culture,” *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

¹¹⁵ Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 182.

Michael's study makes the case that radical Christian antisemitism was "the most prominent necessary cause" without which the Holocaust could not have occurred.¹¹⁶ Thus National Socialism was able to cultivate the seedbed of Christian hatred of Jews and harvest it for their own advantages. In drawing attention to the broader pattern of a rejection of otherness, it is not my intention to underestimate Christianity's culpability in fostering a long legacy of hatred towards the Jewish people,¹¹⁷ nor the extent to which traditional Christian theology is infected with antisemitism. The challenge will be to keep attune to the particulars of antisemitism while panning out to focus on the post-Holocaust landscape in order to isolate some broader underlying dynamics therein.

A glaring weakness of the study is that it will primarily be focused on definitions of post-Holocaust theology within a North American and Northern European context because this is where the bulk of the relevant post-Holocaust scholarship has taken place. The study will also be restricted to Christian reflections on the implications of the Holocaust for its own self-understanding, while remaining cognizant of the significant post-Holocaust developments by Jewish theologians as well. The irony is not missed that in trying to reflect upon the Other, the voices of those communities and countries which are most often marginalized within theology are poorly represented here.

Another shortcoming is that the great number of relevant documents pertaining to Holocaust theology and ecclesial post-Holocaust statements made it impossible to include but a sampling of these significant works. I have aimed to

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 183.

¹¹⁷ When using the terms "the Jewish people" and "Judaism" we are not speaking simply in static, historical terms but are describing a contemporary phenomena, the living faith of millions who call themselves Jews and identify themselves in some manner with the history, faith, culture and/or traditions of Judaism. The utilization of the terms "the Jews," "Judaism" and "the Jewish people" is simply meant to reflect terminology within the arena of Christian-Jewish dialogue and is not an attempt to flatly define what is meant by "Jewish," a task which is both impossible and dangerously hegemonic. Jonathan Webber highlights the complexities of defining who is a Jew saying, "There are many competing definitions that are known from the contemporary European experience, including the classical rabbinic definition (descent from a Jewish mother, or via conversion from an Orthodox court of rabbis), modern Progressive rabbinic definitions (descent from a Jewish mother or father, or conversion from a Progressive court of rabbis), Nazi definitions (a given number of Jewish grandparents, regardless of the individual's personal religious or communal affiliations of identity), and modern personal *ad hoc* definitions (self-identifications with the Jewish people, for whatever reason, such as being married or related to a Jew, or being labelled by others as Jewish)." *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, Jonathan Webber ed. (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), 16. In this work, I avoid using phrases such as "the people of Israel," unless directly quoting, because of the highly controversial political and national overtones associated with the phrase.

incorporate those which represent the most prominent positions, developments, and trends within the genre in order to portray the landscape of post-Holocaust theological reflection as accurately as possible. The exclusion of any given statement should not be seen as a judgment on its merit, but is simply a necessary omission to manage the scope of the project.

VI. THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter one will survey the nature, problem, and potential of otherness and exclusion. The deep-seated impulse to reject and exclude¹¹⁸ the Other will be explored sociologically, psychologically, theologically, and finally concretely, through the purge of otherness in Nazi Germany. The goals of chapter one are: (1) to investigate the pervasive tendency to build walls of self-preservation from the Other, arguing that this propensity is rooted in the very core of human existence; (2) to underscore ways in which Christian churches are particularly susceptible to the perils of otherization; (3) to discuss some of the difficulties this widespread pathology raises for Christian theology and ecclesiology in hopes of elucidating the urgency of these issues for the churches today.

Chapter two will sketch the dominant trends and “spectrum of views”¹¹⁹ evident in the work of ecclesial bodies and post-Holocaust theologians as they grapple with the arduous task of rethinking Christian doctrine and praxis in the shadow of Nazi brutality. It will: (1) survey a selection of reports, statements and studies from Roman Catholic and Protestant churches within Europe and North America, as well as from ecumenical assemblies such as the WCC, in order to understand the official theological positions of churches and church bodies as they reflect upon the Holocaust and their understanding of that event; (2) briefly introduce the genre known as Holocaust theology, highlight its deconstructive nature and

¹¹⁸ Exclusion is a complex concept but most basically describes the way in which individuals or groups are cut off from participation in society or from taking part in a particular sphere of society. Exclusion is defined by Harvard sociologist Hilary Silver as “a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live.” *Social Exclusion: Comparative Analysis of Europe and Middle East* (Washington, DC: Wolfesohn Centre for Development, 2007), 15.

¹¹⁹ I am indebted to James F. Moore for this phrase. See Moore, “A Spectrum of Views: Traditional Christian Responses to the Holocaust,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 25:2, (1988). 212-224.

summarize the contributions this movement has made toward a post-Holocaust reformation of Christian theology in relation to the Jewish people in areas such as Christology, missiology, soteriology, etc.

Chapter three will return to the threads within Christian post-Holocaust theology that were brought to the fore in the previous chapter. These threads will be analyzed through the multifaceted lens of otherness and exclusion that was created in chapter one. I will argue that while invaluable progress has been made toward reimagining Christian theology after the Holocaust, three dominant trends are perceptible within post-Holocaust reflections that might serve to aggravate rather than ameliorate the problem of a rejection of otherness.

The first problematic trend lies in the contention that the cure for the malady of antisemitism, which plagued the churches under the Third Reich, is found in a renewed understanding of and appreciation for the common roots between Christianity and Judaism. This resounding emphasis on a joint spiritual heritage between Judaism and Christianity has led Christians to reexamine their relationship with the Jewish people in search of a better understanding of their own faith. However, when viewed through the prism of otherness, the price of this accentuation on commonalties is a serious compromise to the self-understandings of both faiths and the potential negation of the need to embrace the Other in all his or her terrifying strangeness.

Second, and closely connected to the former, is the tendency within these works toward witness-people thinking (i.e. casting the Jewish people into the static role of “living revelations to others”).¹²⁰ In spite of the numerous positive steps post-Holocaust theologians and ecclesial bodies have made in ameliorating the relationship between Jews and Christians, tendencies still remain which exacerbate the problem of otherness by imposing a reified narrative on the Jewish people which is not consonant with Jewish self-conceptions.

Third, because the churches’ failure toward the majority of persecuted victims of the Nazi regime is diagnosed within ecclesial statements and the work of

¹²⁰ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1995), 172. Building on Haynes work, Hannah Holtschneider laments that “The ‘witness-people myth’ emerges as the organising principle with which the churches approach Christian-Jewish history as well as the Holocaust.” See *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Münster: Lit. Verlag, 2001), 36.

Holocaust theologians almost exclusively in terms of an acute antisemitism, significant questions are left unexplored about how the churches conceived of their moral obligation to the millions of victims under the Third Reich who were not Jewish. There was also no escape for Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, the mentally and physically disabled, homosexuals, Communists, Slavs, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and political opponents of the Nazi regime. What is the significance of the churches' reticence vis-à-vis these other unfortunate expendables? And why have churches, post-Holocaust, continued to be largely silent vis-à-vis situations of genocide and a destruction of otherness? A sustained focus on the churches' attitude toward non-Jewish victims evokes troubling questions that cannot be ignored.

Chapter four will steer toward a more constructive approach and establish some groundwork for both Christian identity and ecclesial identity, which will serve as a scaffold for reflections on ecclesial practices in light of otherness. The chapter will explore the potential that distorted identities have to breed violence against the Other through an analysis of both genocide and sectarianism. The chapter will also suggest resources within the Christian faith for the cultivation of inclusive, multi-dimensional identities capable of making space for the Other.

Chapter five will conclude by briefly envisioning some ecclesial characteristics and practices that might better enable churches to begin to grapple with the pervasive challenge of a rejection of otherness. These are (1) a posture of embrace toward the Other, (2) solidarity and vastly reconfigured boundaries of moral obligation, and (3) the practice of hospitality which entails radical welcome.

CHAPTER I: OTHERNESS AND EXCLUSION

It may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference. The issue is urgent. The ghettos and battlefields throughout the world—in the living rooms, in inner cities, or on the mountain ranges—testify indisputably to its importance.¹

Before turning to a survey and an analysis of ecclesial statements and Holocaust theologians, it will be helpful to describe the lens through which I am reading these resources and the structures that guide my assessment. The following section will (1) explore the pervasive tendency rooted in the very core of our existence to build walls of self-preservation from the Other, (2) discuss some of the difficulties this widespread pathology raises for Christian theology and ecclesiology in order to highlight how critical these issues are for the church today; and (3) examine this insidious impulse through a concrete and horrific illustration of the purge of otherness in Nazi Germany. While the discussion that follows seeks to bring issues of otherness, identity, and exclusion to the foreground, it is not intended to offer simplistic definitions or concrete answers, but rather to illustrate the kinds of questions and issues that need to be tackled amidst the complexities and ambiguities of otherness. The chapter will begin with an exploration of the elusive notion of the Other.

One of the most fundamental elements of human nature, inherited from birth, is tribalism, which is the demarcation of boundaries through the creation of an Other, shaping distinct “us” and “them” categories. John D. Zizioulas has written an excellent account on the ubiquitousness of the fear of the Other, calling it a “pathology, built into the very roots of our existence.”² The empirical evidence for this primordial tendency to bind oneself to homogeneity and eschew heterogeneity is incontrovertible; so much so that many scholars have labeled this tendency one of the

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20.

² John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 1.

few true human universals.³ While Western societies ostensibly value tolerance and purport acceptance of diversity and difference, there is a much more powerful impulse lurking just beneath the surface. As Michael Steele says, “The extensions of Otherness reach into the very recesses of our consciousness, so that we cannot perceive the world and its inhabitants outside of this filter.”⁴

I. WHO IS THE OTHER?

Who or what is meant by the “Other”? When speaking about otherness and the Other we are confronted straightaway with a problem of language—other than who, different than what? The irony is that as soon as we attempt to delineate the features or to mold the constructs of the Other, he or she is no longer Other— but becomes subject to our imposed definitions.⁵ Gabriella Lettini articulates this challenge saying, “To speak of otherness means to be engaged with a subject which by definition should not be graspable, a subject that should always remain elusive.”⁶ The intrinsic nature of the Other is something that cannot and in fact *should not* be defined—and yet in labeling something or someone as Other we ineluctably characterize them.

Herein lies one of the great challenges we encounter when grappling with otherness—we must attempt to define what we mean by the Other, while recognizing the deficiencies in our own descriptions, as well as our idolatrous need to relegate the Other to our own sameness. Theologian Edward Farley articulates the ineffability of otherness saying, “As an actor and self-initiator, the other has a privileged position of self-knowledge and self-interpretation which resists my assessments and interpretations directed to it. The other as other resists my efforts to incorporate it into my world and perspective.”⁷ Steven Smith also highlights the danger of facile assumptions, which are inherent in studies of otherness. “The ‘Other’,” he states,

³ James Waller “Deliver Us From Evil: Genocide and the Christian World,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, Supplemental Series 2 (2007): 138-152.

⁴ Michael Steele, *Christianity, The Other and The Holocaust*, 122.

⁵ While many of the original philosophers and scholars on otherness focused on the Other as an individual, another point to bear in mind regarding the Other is that by extension a community, tribe, or culture can also function in many respects as Other.

⁶ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy to the Other’: Christian Theology and Its ‘Others’ in Modern Western Theological Discourses,” Ph.D. diss. (Union Theological Seminary, 2003), xiv.

⁷ Quoted in Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights*, 30. Likewise, Allen says “A key notion here is that an Other has its own integrity. It is who or what it is, and not what I (or anyone else) would like for it to be. The Other has the right to be what it is. The Other should be able to interpret itself as it wants to be understood.” Allen, *Preaching and the Other*, 30.

is one of those words that is easy to say but hard to mean. Like its sister-word ‘transcendence,’ it belies itself every time it is used, for by means of it we comprehend quite nicely what supposedly exceeds our powers of comprehension. And this problem worsens as Otherness becomes a common theme of reflection and academic discussion. Familiarly breeds...familiarity.⁸

On a similar note, Denise Ackermann elucidates the expansive plane of otherness, as well as the intricacies of depicting the Other. Her statement is worth quoting at length:

To speak of the other is to speak of space, boundaries, time and difference. It is to speak of our bodies, cultures, traditions, ideologies and beliefs. To speak of the other is to speak of that other human being whom I may mistakenly have assumed to be just like me and who, in fact, is not like me at all. To speak of the other is to be open to otherness within myself, to the possibility of a foreigner within my own unconscious self. To speak of the other is to speak of poverty and justice, of human sexuality, of gender, race and class. To speak of the other is to acknowledge that difference is problematic, often threatening, even alienating and that we do not always live easily or well with it. To speak of the other is to speak of the nature of the church, the one body of many parts, challenged to unity in Jesus Christ. To speak of the Other is to speak about the ambiguity of God, the One who is Wholly Other and Wholly Related. We must always be alert to the reality of difference. It will not go away, neither should it.⁹

So how do we begin to define the Other amidst these dangers and complexities? Michael Steele defines the Other as “those who stand outside the Christian confession, either by geographical accident, race, religious tradition or chosen belief, or some other demarcating factor.”¹⁰ Steele’s definition of the Other seems myopic toward countless examples in which Christians deem their fellow Christians as a threatening Other, often even those whose appearance and beliefs

⁸ Steven G. Smith, *The Argument to the Other: Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, Number 42 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), vii.

⁹ Denise Ackermann, “Becoming Fully Human: An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness” (Cambridge, MA: Episcopal Divinity School, 1999). This paper was delivered at the plenary of Section One “Call to Full Humanity” of the 13th Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion on 20 July 1998.

¹⁰ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 5.

may be somewhat analogous. Miroslav Volf offers this definition of the Other which is much broader and more appropriate for our theological reflections:

The ‘others’—persons of other culture, religion, other economic status and so on—are not people we read about from distant lands. We see them daily on the screens in our living rooms; we pass by them on our streets. They are our colleagues and neighbors, some of them are even our spouses. The others are among us; they are part of us. Yet they remain others, often pushed to the margins.¹¹

Volf’s definition makes us cognizant of several important characteristics of the Other. While the question of who is the Other will vary greatly depending on one’s context, we should not assume that the Others are simply persons “out there,” nor should we imagine that, because they might be deeply intertwined with our daily lives, they are any less outsiders. Thus, the term “stranger” is a familiar way to characterize what is meant by Other—and seems to get at the heart of the notion of otherness. Marc Gopin sees great consonance between the biblical concept of stranger (or sojourner) which he characterizes as the “classic Other in monotheism.”¹² While Gopin says there is an “elastic quality” to the conception of the stranger which defies any precise definitions, we can begin to know the stranger at least in some imperfect manner, because there is a moment in time where we become contemporaneous with the stranger, dwelling in the same space and time.¹³ In a similar vein, Elie Wiesel uses the term stranger to describe the Other saying the stranger is

someone who suggests the unknown, the prohibited, the beyond; he seduces, he attracts, he wounds—and he leaves . . . The stranger represents what you are not, what you cannot be, simply because you are not he . . . The stranger is the other. He is not bound by your laws, by your memories; his language is not yours, nor his silence.¹⁴

¹¹ Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’,” in *A Spacious Heart*, 38-9.

¹² Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” in *Explorations in Reconciliation*, 6.

¹³ Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 6-7.

¹⁴ Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory*, 59-60.

This diverse sampling of reflections on otherness accentuates the difficulties as well as the dangers of defining the Other. Two salient points can be gleaned here. First, we must be aware that the very concept of otherness, as well as the need to define the Other, always springs from some sort of normative self.¹⁵ In other words, our speech and our efforts to identify the Other originate from our own limited vantage point and are perceived through the lens of our beliefs and experiences. Thus, there is a great risk of idolatry associated with characterizing the Other, rooted in a propensity to impose our own narrative. We must be cognizant of the temptation to propound narrow, normative definitions that flatten out the rich diversity of the Other. Second, we must take note that the question “Who is *my* Other?” will vary greatly depending on one’s context. As Volf pointed out, the Other is not always to be found in some remote, foreign land, nor is the Other always located outside of the Christian faith. The Other can, in fact, dwell very near to us—as near as own home and as close as our own community.

II. OTHERNESS AND THE POSTMODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Before delving into a theological reflection on otherness, I will first briefly characterize the climate of the postmodern landscape. While the postmodern ethos rhapsodizes about the merits of plurality and tolerance, there is little doubt that we live in a culture deeply riven by otherness or alterity.¹⁶ Otherness and how to engage with difference is a motif that permeates the postmodern approach to the world; few issues have exercised so powerful a hold over the thought of this century as that of

¹⁵ Gabriella Lettini notes that this fixed normative self is most often white and male. She highlights how difficult it is to see beyond this normative lens, saying “Even when feminist and liberationist theologians started to claim their own voices, both criticizing the way they had been ‘otherized’ and yet claiming their own ‘different identity’, they did not engage in a thorough critique of the ideological framework which had rendered otherness problematic. Thus they often ultimately reinforced the same hegemonic paradigm they were otherwise criticizing.” See “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” xvi.

¹⁶ Alterity, which comes from the Latin *alter* has several meanings: (1) the state of being other or different, (2) the circumstance of “others” who are nominalized and distanced by hierarchical and stereotypical thinking, (3) a technical term in postcolonial studies denoting the condition of otherness resulting from imposition of western culture, and (4) a category such that the markers of difference indicate the alterity of the Other is irreducible and infinite. Curtis W. Freeman, “Alterity and Its Cure,” *CrossCurrents*, 59:4 (2009): 404-441.

the Other;¹⁷ the proliferation of sociological, psychological, philosophical, and theological discourse on the problem of difference¹⁸ reflects this reality. The question of how to engage the Other and co-exist with discomfiting disparateness is a pressing one, particularly as we navigate an increasingly multicultural and pluralistic world fraught with the challenges of political, economical, and cultural globalization.

David Tracy characterizes the current cultural climate as being fundamentally defined by otherness and difference:

Our deepest need, as philosophy and theology in our period show, is the drive to face otherness and difference. Those others must include all the subjugated others within Western European and North American culture, the others outside that culture, especially the poor and the oppressed now speaking clearly and forcefully, the terrifying otherness lurking in our own psyches and cultures, the other great religions and civilizations, the differences disseminating in all the words and structures of our own Indo-European languages.¹⁹

Jacob Neusner makes a similar observation, pointing to urgency of religious communities and organizations grappling with difference. He states, “The single most important problem facing religion for the next hundred years, as for the last, is an intellectual one: how to think through difference, how to account, within one’s own faith and framework, for the outsider, indeed, for many outsiders.”²⁰ Neusner remarks that the daily headlines, rife with violence, are a strident testimony that religions are incapable of cultivating for themselves a “useful theory of the other.”²¹

¹⁷ For salient works on the notion of otherness within a postmodern context see: David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, (Louvain: Peeters, 1991); Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters : Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2003); Paul R. Sponheim, *Faith and the Other: A Relational Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Wendy Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); and Anselm Kyonqsuk Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹⁸ The use of the phrase “problem of difference” is meant in no way to imply that difference/otherness are problematic *per se* (i.e. something to be “fixed” or eradicated). The phrase simply underscores the problems and complexities which inherently spring from the deep-seated pathology to hermetically seal oneself off from otherness.

¹⁹ David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 4.

²⁰ Neusner, “Thinking About ‘The Other’ In Religion: It is Necessary, But Is It Possible?” in *Modern Theology*, vol. 6:3 (April 1990): 273.

²¹ *Ibid.*

The work of Emmanuel Levinas is arguably the most influential postmodern source of reflection on the Other, accentuating that attention to the Other and otherness constitutes a grave matter of ethical responsibility which cannot simply be ignored.²² Levinas writes from the perspective of having been a “disconfirming other” himself.²³ His work laments the widespread tendency to cultivate totality and uniformity and to shrink from encounters with difference, infinity, or strangeness. The modern self is predominated by an egological understanding of reality, and thus interprets the experiences of others almost exclusively in light of this egotistical perspective. Levinas sees the principal aim of many Western societies, groups, and individuals as the proliferation of familiarity or sameness that ultimately serves to preserve the status quo while devaluing and repressing otherness.²⁴

Levinas roots his concern for the Other in principles of ethics, rather than ontology. The very presence of the Other serves as a summons to respect the Other. The infinity of others is a call to honor them in their distinctiveness. He beckons us toward an encounter with the face of the Other saying “The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger.”²⁵

We must not assume that “face” in Levinas’ thinking coincides with the Other’s appearance or somehow represents the Other, rather it is in the visage of the Other that we recognize that “the other is invisible”²⁶ and our perceptions of the Other are always partial and fragmentary, never perfect or absolute. Thus we must always contend with the temptation to reduce the Other to our sameness. For Levinas, ethical responsibility for the Other is not merely an ideal, nor is it optional; it is an ineluctable demand of human existence. Ethical responsibility is what constitutes the self, even prior to choice and thus, moral responsibility to the Other is

²² See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); *Time and Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990); *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts, 1981); and *Ethics and Infinity?* trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985). In addition, see Sean Hand, ed. *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). For a guide to the various types and themes of the postmodern theology of otherness and difference, see *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²³ The term is used in Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 63. Levinas lived in France during World War II and was imprisoned in a concentration camp from 1940-1945. Although he and his wife and children survived the Holocaust, many within his Jewish community perished.

²⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 6.

part of the very order of creation. Thus Levinas' famous contention that [the self] "is made of responsibilities."²⁷

III. ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER

What are the perils we face in encountering the Other? Denise Ackermann pinpoints at least three problematic responses that take place vis-à-vis an encounter with the Other. The first peril is to envision the Other as a sort of *tabula rasa*, a being devoid of a story, of selfhood, of history. While this tendency is rampant in a myriad of contexts, one example of this outlook is clearly illustrated in certain missionary endeavors to create religious converts. Individuals and groups are approached simply as blank slates waiting to be transcribed with the missionaries' own image. The subtext of this mentality is that "you should be like me. But, as you are not like me, remember that I am the centre, the fixed point by which you and 'the rest' will be defined."²⁸

The second and more venomous peril when encountering the Other is to judge him/her as a menace to be reckoned with, a response that is all too familiar in our contemporary context. Here, Ackermann points to examples of the apartheid mentality of Afrikaner nationalism, the atrocities of the Nazis and the Hutus, as well as the "intransigent otherness" of the Serbs, Bosnians and Croats.²⁹ The core narrative underlying this reaction is "Only we have the truth and those who are different are our enemy."³⁰ It is important to point out that the first mentality of the Other as a *tabula rasa* can slide easily into this second mentality (e.g. the Conquistadors and the genocide of the American Indians).

Thirdly, Ackermann highlights a response to the Other which unfolds in two distinct yet similar ways: either the Other is viewed as a kind of "exotic, romantic being"³¹ which is too peculiar to be taken seriously; or the Other is pigeonholed into a kind of amorphous, universal category (such as when Jews are not seen as

²⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2003) 67.

²⁸ Ackermann, "In *Becoming Fully Human: An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness*," 15.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For example the 19th century Western notion of the "noble savage" or a common assumption in the burgeoning women's movement that saw "women" as one monolithic but amorphous category of human beings.

variegated people in particular but as the static category of “The Jews”). Robert Vosloo describes the problems endemic to this perspective saying “Within such a framework the other is viewed as an abstract ideal or serves to satisfy our aesthetic appetite for strangeness. Such a romanticised notion of otherness fails to take the concrete identity of the other seriously.”³² These responses are problematic because by morphing the Other into a romantic ideal or a universal category, the uniqueness of the Other is flattened, their identity is permanently reified.

IV. HOW OTHERIZATION TAKES PLACE

Having illustrated the virtual impossibility of offering a concise definition of the Other, as well as potential dangers in encountering the Other, we will now turn to investigate how the process of otherization takes place, particularly how boundaries of identity and solidarity are constructed deleteriously vis-à-vis the Other?³³ While theories regarding this process abound, I will delineate a few key elements of the virulent progression of otherization in hopes of elucidating the abysmal substrata of fear and enmity towards the Other.

The inherent impulse to agglomerate based on commonalities and set ourselves apart from and in contrast to heterogeneous groups and individuals should not be underestimated. This intractable tendency is embedded in our very DNA as human beings, in the body’s ability to distinguish friendly bacteria from foreign bacteria which could cause disease. If we can avoid exposure to that which is strange, we are enabled to foster safety and predictability, and thus elude the danger that

³² Robert Vosloo, “Identity, Otherness and the Triune God: Theological Groundwork for a Christian Ethic of Hospitality” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 119 (2004), 70.

³³ It is essential to note that I am not implying that “otherization” or differentiation are insidious in and of themselves, which is what Regina Schwartz argues in her provocative work *The Curse of Cain*. Schwartz explores the relationship between monotheism and identity, arguing that monotheism forges identity antithetically and contributes directly to violent practices. Thus, Schwartz locates the origins of violence inherently in the process of identity formation itself, in the very act of demarcating boundaries which distinguish and separate us from others. Schwartz says, “Violence is not only what we do to the Other. It is prior to that. Violence is the very construction of the Other....history has shown that in the name of our identities—religious, ethnic, national, racial, gender—we commit and suffer the most horrific atrocities.” *Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5. In contrast to Schwartz, I suggest that identity is *necessarily* constituted by particularities. Separation, to some degree, is essential for the creative formation of identity. Being blind to this reality can be both dangerous and oppressive—leading to the practice of assimilation. Rather it is necessary to have what Volf calls distance and belonging—whereby the Other is able to remain wholly Other—with his/her own unique narrative and an identity which is given—rather than imposed.

could result if the Other had a place in our world. While virtually every society carries a desire to distinguish itself from others and to circumscribe boundaries of identity between us and them, it is imperative to understand how otherness and normal processes of differentiation can turn deadly. Thus the concern here is to delineate the manner in which these “normal” impulses devolve into potentially lethal ones.

The research of social psychologist James Waller offers a unique contribution to our understanding of how the insidious process of otherization takes place. Waller exposes prominent patterns of thoughts and behaviors within human interactions and institutions, particularly focusing his reflections on otherization within Christian institutions. He examines the way in which human beings come to be labeled as execrable and consequently “excommunicated” from the moral community. Waller’s analysis of the construction of the Other will be explored first on a broader psychological and sociological level, and then subsequently in the way the process of excommunication unfolds specifically within Christian institutions. I will intertwine the discussion of these mechanisms with a portrait of how they functioned in Nazi Germany, concretely illustrating this process on both a psychological and institutional level.

In *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Murder*, Waller offers an instructive model, the “The Psychological Construction of the Other,” which describes how ordinary people become capable of committing genocide and mass killing.³⁴ Waller’s work is significant for our purposes here, not only because he provides an excellent explanatory model of otherization, but because he perceptively highlights how imperative it is that individuals and institutions contend with the problem of otherness. His work offers a much needed corrective to our tendency to lump the evil of genocide, as well as the perpetrators thereof, into a neat and tidy conceptual box labeled “ultimate evil.”

Perpetrators such as Hitler, Mengele, or more recently Osama bin Laden and suicide bombers, are too easily cast into the historical rubbish bin as “Monsters,” allowing us to evade the complex and difficult questions their behavior elicits. The result of this disassociation is the creation of a safe emotional space which imagines

³⁴ See chapter seven in Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, 196-220.

we ourselves would never traverse the wide chasm between more “mild” forms of a rejection of otherness (sexism, ageism, homophobia, etc.) and outright acts of brutality. Stephen Haynes observes how such disassociation takes place in the post-Holocaust context: “For many the demonization of the Germans still functions as a compelling explanation of the Holocaust. This explanation places distance between us and the perpetrators by viewing them as monstrous, amoral, criminal, and sociopathic.”³⁵

Waller paints a vivid trajectory of how ostensibly “benign” ways of rejecting the Other have the potential to spawn horrific destruction. His work effectively discredits many of the “psychological mechanisms” we cling to in hopes of fostering a comforting distance between ourselves and the perpetrators of atrocities. He believes that the best safeguard against future genocide and acts of violence against the Other is to remain deeply cognizant of our own capacity for evil, as well as profoundly aware of the cultural, psychological and social mechanisms that can exacerbate enmity and ultimately breed genocidal acts toward the Other.

Waller identifies three mechanisms which are central to understanding the psychological construction of the Other in cases of genocide and mass killing: us-them thinking, moral disengagement, and blaming the victim.³⁶

First, “Us-them” thinking, as previously mentioned, is a principle seated deep within the human psyche, functioning as a fundamental mechanism for organizing human society. Once the ambit between them and us has been rigidly demarcated and solidified, we have an ingrained tendency to designate members of our own group as superior to all others, and can even be reluctant to recognize members of other groups as deserving of equal respect.³⁷ While Waller is careful to point out that us-them thinking does not *necessarily* lead to genocide and mass killing, it becomes

³⁵ Haynes, *Holocaust Education and the Church-Related College* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 60. The notion of the “banality of evil” was brought to light in Hannah Arendt’s 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which was based on the trial of Adolph Eichmann—often designated as the architect of the Final Solution. Arendt’s main thesis was that those who commit appalling crimes, such as Eichmann, may not be raging, homicidal lunatics at all, but rather are often ordinary people who are simply following orders in good bureaucratic fashion. More recently, Christopher Browning made the argument that the brutal, genocidal acts of the Final Solution were carried out by regular men who appeared “just like us.” See *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

³⁶ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 198.

³⁷ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil: Genocide and the Christian World,” 141.

much easier to exaggerate differences and remain hermetically sealed off from contact with the Other once this decisive first step is taken.³⁸

The second mechanism for the psychological construction of the Other is “Moral Disengagement.” This term is, however, somewhat of a misnomer— because moral disengagement entails much more than a stance of apathy and detachment. Waller characterizes moral disengagement as an “active, but gradual, process of detachment by which some individuals or groups are placed outside the boundary within which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply.”³⁹ This insidious process of moral disengagement is ultimately a three-fold development involving moral justification, dehumanization of victims, and euphemistic labeling of evil actions. We will explore each of these three aspects of moral disengagement more in depth.

First, moral justification takes place when perpetrators are able to justify their nefarious actions through a “self-justifying mental gymnastic” proclaiming these actions are crucial for their own self-defense. Waller lists some common forms this ostensibly innocuous moral justification can take: to safeguard treasured values of the community, maintain peace and stability, prevent oppression, or to honor national commitments.⁴⁰ Each of these speciously “righteous” motives allows the dominant group to paint their actions with a veneer of moral probity, while simultaneously viewing themselves as vanguards of the precious principles and commitments their community holds dear. Once these props for moral justifications are firmly in place, the stage is set for dehumanization.⁴¹

Social psychologists Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton describe the dehumanization of victims as two kinds of “deprivations.” First, victims are deprived

³⁸ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 201.

³⁹ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 202.

⁴⁰ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 203.

⁴¹ The *Muselmann* epitomizes the success of the Nazi Regime at the art of dehumanizing their victims in the *l'univers concentrationnaire*. Primo Levi says “The musselmänner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march to labor in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death in the face of which they have no fear, they are too tired to understand.... If I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image, which is familiar to me: an emaciated man with head dropped and shoulders curved, on which face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought is to be seen.” *Primo Levi, If This is a Man*, 96. For more about the devaluation of victims see “Disinhibition of Aggression Through Diffusion of Responsibility and Dehumanization of Victims” by Albert Bandura, Bill Underwood, and Michael E. Fromson in *Journal of Research in Personality*, 9 (1975): 253-269.

of their identity by relegating them wholesale to a universal, static category (e.g. “The Jew,” “The Savage,” “The Terrorist”). Second, victims are divested of their place in the community. They are expelled not only from their local, geographical community but expelled altogether from the community of the human family. After being excluded from the human family, exclusion from the universe of moral obligation most certainly follows.⁴²

This process of dehumanization can be discerned in vivid ways in the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany. Historian Marion Kaplan has applied the term “social death”, which she calls, “the prerequisite for deportation and genocide” to describe what happened to Jews in under the Third Reich. She states,

Well before the physical death of German Jews, the German ‘racial community’—the man and woman on the street, the real ‘ordinary Germans’—made Jews suffer social death every day. This social death was the prerequisite for deportation and genocide. Regarding victims as outside our universe of obligation and, therefore, not deserving of compassionate treatment removes normal moral restraints against aggression. The body of a dehumanized victim possesses no meaning. It is waste, and its removal is a matter of sanitation. There is no moral or empathic context through which the perpetrator can relate to the victim.⁴³

Finally, the third component of moral disengagement is euphemistic labeling of evil actions (e.g. the Nazis’ killing was called sanitation, mercy killing, resettlement, or special treatment). Haig Bosmajian emphasizes that “the distance between the linguistic dehumanization of a people and their actual suppression and extermination is not great.”⁴⁴ The skillful process of dehumanization through euphemistic labeling is evidenced in Nazi propaganda films juxtaposing pictures of the stereotypical Jew with photos of swarming pestilence in need of extermination, ensuring that Jews were stripped of all semblances of human qualities so their termination could be accepted without a scintilla of moral repugnance.⁴⁵

⁴² Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Towards a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (Yale University Press, 1990), 19-20.

⁴³ Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

⁴⁴ Haig A. Bosmajian, *The Language of Oppression* (University Press of America, 1983), 29.

⁴⁵ Another example which illustrates how prominent this dehumanizing rhetoric was recorded by Robert J. Lifton. A Nazi doctor in Auschwitz named Fritz Klein was asked by a Jewish doctor how he could reconcile his Hippocratic Oath with his murderous work near the gas chambers. Klein replied, “Out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew

After exploring the ingredients of moral disengagement, we turn to the final mechanism of otherization: blaming the victim. This mechanism employs “the just-world phenomenon” and maintains that victims deserve or even ask for their victimization.⁴⁶ Robert Wistrich says,

Scapegoating and the projection of evil onto humans who have been demonized is a universal human problem...it helps construct a moral order against the dangerous, disruptive, defiling Other. The Other (who is generally assumed to share a different moral and social code) must the blame and responsibility for everything that goes wrong in “normal” human society.⁴⁷

There is an abundance of evidence within the field of social psychology that perpetrators, bystanders, and even victims see the world as ultimately just and fair, a phenomenon that Waller considers a self-protective device. If people who undergo suffering have somehow brought it upon themselves—and are, therefore, simply eating their just desserts, we are able to find solace in the presumption that we ourselves would behave more circumspectly than those improvident victims have.⁴⁸ The upshot of this just-world mentality is that we are enabled to be cognitively indifferent toward evil and toward the suffering Other. The bystander sees no need for involvement because the suffering is condign; their plight is just as it should be.

is the gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind.” Quoted in Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: A Study in the Psychology of Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 16. It is interesting to note that Martin Luther used similar terminology to describe the Jews in his notorious *On the Jews and Their Lies*. He encouraged German rulers to act ‘like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone and marrow.’” In Mordecai Paldiel, *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans and Reconciliation* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 2006), 20.

⁴⁶ This phrase was originally coined by social psychologist Melvin Lerner who described it as the tendency of people to believe that the world is a just place and therefore, people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. For more see Melvin J Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Decision* (New York: Plenum Press, 1980).

⁴⁷ Wistrich, *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia* (Taylor & Francis, 1999), 8.

⁴⁸ For example, not only were the Jewish people blamed during the reign of the Third Reich for a host calumnies (e.g. being Christ-killers, well-poisoning, blood libel, being avaricious, demanding, money-grubbing, etc.) but the mechanism of blaming the victim continues on, long after the atrocities of the Holocaust. This is evident, for example, when it is posited that Jews who suffered during the Holocaust could have resisted more, could have been less cooperative in their own destruction, and could have not gone to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter. Or it is often suggested they should have read the obvious writing on the wall about the deteriorating situation and left German-occupied territory while they still had the chance. Such examples of blaming the victim abound during and after the Holocaust.

Waller's three mechanisms of otherization offer an explanatory blueprint for how genocide and mass killing become possible for ordinary people.

American philosopher Calvin Schrag also offers an astute description of how the process of otherization is complete. He depicts the way otherness becomes execrable by illustrating the psychological progression whereby the Other is seen as increasingly separate, alien, estranged, and ultimately as a menace in dire need of annihilation. His study is guided by the query, "How can we keep otherness from sliding into a signifier of a radical evil that impedes our very powers of comprehension?"⁴⁹ Schrag begins with a simple definition of the Other saying "that which is other is somehow *separate* or *different from* a given object, person, event, or state of affairs."⁵⁰ He sees this separateness as part and parcel of our humanity, of our "terrestrial finitude" as earthly creatures.⁵¹ Therefore, this separateness in and of itself, does not constitute full-scale alienation or estrangement.

How does the Other devolve into a radical evil? Schrag believes this devolution unfolds when the Other is deemed as imperiling personal, social, or national interests. In order for otherness to deteriorate into alienation or estrangement, there must be an "intrusion of evil" which is perceived as "unmitigated and rotten to the core" demanding drastic measures for its extirpation.⁵² Once this impending threat is felt, expeditious actions for self-preservation are exigent. When a group is monolithically defined as "unmitigated evil," conditions are ripe for genocide. Schrag continues,

The other as unmitigated evil is seen as a germ that threatens to infect one's lifeworld and needs to be uprooted and all traces of the existence of the same destroyed. The other as individual or group—and for the perpetrator of genocide there is no distinction between the two—is to be ferreted out, isolated, and annihilated so as to ensure the purity and safety of those who feel threatened.⁵³

⁴⁹ Calvin Schrag, "Otherness and the Problem of Evil: How Does That Which Is Other Evil?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60 (2006): 151.

⁵⁰ Schrag, "Otherness and the Problem of Evil," 151 (emphasis his).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Schrag, "Otherness and the Problem of Evil," 151.

⁵³ Schrag, "Otherness and the Problem of Evil," 152.

Bruce Wilshire confirms this survivalist mentality adding, “All members of the alien group must be killed or incapacitated because each carries the germ of the alien world-experience: each threatens to poison and undermine the only world in which the home group has learned to live.”⁵⁴

Schrag’s work progresses our understanding of how otherness slides into a “signifier of radical evil.” When the Other denotes radical evil, it is not only the immediate threat of the Other’s presence which merits annihilation, but also the eradication of all memory of the Other.⁵⁵ “This involves not only silencing the witnesses,” says Schrag, “but also all narratives about the witnesses, auguring in the direction of a veritable erasing of all traces of those who have been victimized.”⁵⁶ Thus, the goal of genocide is to utterly stamp out the Other from the face of the earth. Genocide aims to send the Other into everlasting oblivion; its desideratum is “a veritable deletion of the other from the memory bank of history.”⁵⁷

Rosemary Radford Ruether explores a similar concept of “the ideology of the ‘other’ as of lesser value”⁵⁸ and delineates the malignant outcome of this mentality. She employs the terms “projection” and “exploitation” to describe two distinct, yet interrelated elements of an ideology where the Other is a blight to be reckoned with. The process of projection entails first, an externalization of the negative traits which the group in power refuses to acknowledge in itself, and next, the subsequent attributing of those negative traits to the Other. This process of projection provides an ideological justification for exploitation; harvesting oppression, abuse, and even murder of the other group, which is deemed as inferior or subhuman.⁵⁹

Another significant contribution which helps characterize the nature of otherization is found in the work of Helen Fein. In her sustained analyses of genocide, she identifies several pre-conditions for genocidal action that bear mention here. First, the victims of genocide are typically defined outside the universe of obligation of the dominant group, thus rendering the humanity of the victims

⁵⁴ Bruce Wilshire, *Get ‘Em All! Kill ‘Em! Genocide, Terrorism, Righteous Communities* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), xiv.

⁵⁵ Schrag, “Otherness and the Problem of Evil,” 152.

⁵⁶ Schrag, “Otherness and the Problem of Evil,” 151.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 162.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

invisible. Fein's notion of the universe of moral obligation is a key concept we will revisit throughout the work. Second, Fein says a political or cultural crisis of some sort threatens the identity of the dominant group. Third, an elite group concocts a political formula or myth that rationalizes their ascension to power and establishes the rights of the group in power as paramount.⁶⁰ While this is only a cursory sketch of Fein's work, her point is to outline the precariousness of a context where there is a lack of safeguards which protect against both the abuse of power and the mythologization of the Other. Without these safeguards, the preconditions for genocide are firmly in place; the Other, to use Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, is seen as a mere weed that the gardener must extirpate.⁶¹ One frightening observation from this condensed section on the process of otherization is how rapidly (or rabidly) the Other becomes a radical evil, utterly devoid of the image of the Divine.

V. OTHERIZATION WITHIN CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

Now that the sociological and psychological mechanisms of otherization have been briefly sketched, we will survey how otherization is manifested within Christian institutions, concentrating largely on Christian institutions throughout Europe during the Holocaust. While cognizant of the unique cultural, historical, and theological dynamics at play during this era, it is advantageous to examine the more universal patterns of behavior which laid the groundwork for responses to genocide during the Holocaust. These patterns of behavior illustrate the alarming reality that a rejection of the Other is a malady just as pervasive in our contemporary context as it was in Nazi Germany.⁶² Bauman confirms, "None of the societal conditions that made

⁶⁰ Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 9.

⁶¹ In *Modernity and the Holocaust* Bauman says "modern genocide, indeed, modern culture and the work of the modern state, is little else than a 'gardening' operation viewing the society it rules as an object of designing, cultivating and weed poisoning" (17). He claims that "Like garden vegetation or a living organism they could not be left to their own devices, lest should they be infested by weeds or overwhelmed by cancerous tissues. Gardening and medicine are functionally distinct forms of the same activity of separating and setting apart useful elements destined to live and thrive, from harmful and morbid ones, which ought to be exterminated" (70).

⁶² Other salient works pertaining to issues of genocide, as well as the role that Christian institutions play are Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959); Arendt *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970); Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack, eds., *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Gerhahn Books, 2001); Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds., *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust* (Los Angeles: The Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1983); Emmanuel

Auschwitz possible has truly disappeared, and no effective measures have been undertaken to prevent such possibilities and principles from generating Auschwitz-like catastrophes.”⁶³

Waller wrestles with the searing question of how Christianity, an institution that “has wielded such a tremendously civilizing effect on human society, can foster institutions that ‘guarantee nothing’ in the context of genocidal violence.”⁶⁴ It is important to note that Waller’s work assesses the church primarily from an institutional, rather than a theological framework. He poses three gripping questions: first, in a world rife with suffering, why do Christian institutions fail to live out the high ideals of their founder? Second, why do those who should recognize the human face of God in their persecuted brothers and sisters fail to do so? Third, what are the historical and ethical implications of Christian institutions response to genocide?⁶⁵

Waller surveys three case studies where Christian institutions (Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox) were present and involved, both in number and in influence: the Holocaust (1939-1945), Rwanda (1994), and Bosnia (1992-1995). He contends that the seeds that germinated into full-blown mass murder were cultivated in the rich soil of cultures that were “dominated, not simply in a nominal sense, by Christianity.”⁶⁶ Waller focuses specifically on analyzing patterns in the way Christian institutions respond to genocide. He skillfully isolates three stages of institutional Christian response to genocide.

The first pattern, which he calls “pre-genocidal responses,” delineates how Christian institutions often lay the seedbed for genocide through a potent mixture of religious belief systems mingled inextricably with ethnic, national, and political identities.⁶⁷ Waller is careful to note that this intermingling is not merely the joining of equals into a balanced synthesis; rather, religion and religious institutions become

Katongole and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (Harper Collins, 1986); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Rittner, Carol, John K. Roth, and Wendy Whitworth, eds., *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2004); and David P. Gushee, *Righteous Gentile of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2003).

⁶³ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 11.

⁶⁴ Waller, “Deliver Us From Evil: Genocide and the Christian World,” 149.

⁶⁵ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 139.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 141ff.

co-opted and are ultimately neutralized by ethnic, national, and political identities. The ramification of this religious, political, and ethnic fusion is the creation of dangerous theological justifications for us-them thinking.

Gregory Baum also points out how problematic us-them thinking is for Christians and Christian institutions, particularly because the narrative of Scripture itself can be seen as sanctioning an acute us-them bifurcation. Baum writes,

It is necessary...to confront the enormous ambiguity of scripture in dealing with the attitude of God's people to outsiders, whether individuals or collectivities. Passages proclaiming universal solidarity are few in comparison with the many passages that restrict solidarity to the believing community. The generosity toward strangers within this community is rarely extended to strangers without. For theological reasons, mindful of the divine election, the Bible encourages a "we-they" discourse that excludes "them" from participation and creates a negative rhetoric of otherness. This ambiguous theological heritage has prompted the church to look upon "the others" simply from its own perspective. The church has tended to define "the others" in its own terms, instead of first listening patiently to how they define themselves and then only reflecting on who they are in light of the Christian faith. The church's attitude throughout its history toward the Jewish people symbolizes the church's near inability to respect the otherness of others.⁶⁸

For Christian institutions, us-them thinking inevitably constricts the churches' universe of moral obligation by defining who is in—and who is out. It is at this incipient stage that Christian institutions begin to forfeit their crucial role as "a prophetic voice of the voiceless" and instead become deeply intertwined with other identities and power holders bent on preserving, rather than challenging, the status quo.⁶⁹ When such a role is forfeited at this critical juncture, the prospect that Christian institutions will be capable of acting as communities of resistance, capable of putting the brakes on genocide, begins to quickly dissipate. Instead, Christian institutions capitulate to what Miroslav Volf has described as "an idolatrous shift of loyalty," whereby allegiance to the gospel of Jesus Christ is supplanted by another cultural, ethnic, or national commitment.⁷⁰ Waller explains that this pernicious shift

⁶⁸ "A Theological Afterword" in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, eds., (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 186.

⁶⁹ Waller, "Deliver Us from Evil," 141.

⁷⁰ Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Interpretation* 54:2, (2000) 158.

of allegiances sanctions Christian institutions to “build the scaffolding for moral sanctions, or exclusions, that heighten intergroup tensions and may, ultimately, ‘excommunicate’ the victims of genocidal violence from the perpetrator’s moral community.”⁷¹

A stark instantiation of this fusion of religious and political identities is manifested in the churches under the Third Reich, where entering into certain social arrangements with the Nazi regime gravely compromised the institutional identities of the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany and throughout Europe. For example, the 1933 concordat between the Vatican and representatives of the Nazi regime ostensibly secured independence from interference in ecclesial affairs and a place of prominence for Catholic schools and other Catholic institutions in Nazi Germany. In exchange, the Catholic Church pledged to not oppose the political or social aims of the Nazi party and to remain “neutral.” On the Protestant side, most of the Protestant churches reacted to Nazi policies circumspectly. They were striving to ensure their own degree of institutional freedom from Nazi interference, largely avoiding public confrontations and negotiating privately with Nazi authorities. Thus, they were ensuring that any Christian opposition to the Nazis was to be largely an individual endeavor. Throughout Hitler’s Germany, bishops and other Christian leaders deliberately avoided antagonizing Nazi officials, content to preserve the status quo whenever possible. Even in the Confessing Church, the ecclesial group within Germany most antagonistic towards Nazism, official public criticism of the Nazi regime was a rarity, particularly when it came to standing up against the persecution of Jews.⁷²

Once political, national, and religious identities become indissolubly fused, the stage is set for what Waller calls “genocidal responses.”⁷³ This second aspect of institutional Christian responses to genocide includes both acts of commission (i.e. actively participating in killings), as well as acts of omission (e.g. silence, indifference, denial). The pattern that emerges during these genocidal responses is

⁷¹ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 141.

⁷² For more examples of this phenomenon see Victoria J. Barnett, “The Role of the Churches: Compliance and Confrontation,” *Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies* 12:2 (1998). Also, for a detailed account of a number of bystanders during the era of National Socialism see: Victoria Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2000).

⁷³ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 143ff.

that Christian institutions behave according to their own narrowly defined interests, with self-preservation as the chief priority.

Under Hitler, most ecclesiastical authorities saw their own institutional survival as a value in itself, one that took precedence over the plight of the victims of Nazism. The acts of commission committed within Christian institutions are the most appalling; here individuals, both laity and clergy, actively participate in and even organized killings. This kind of active partaking in genocide took numerous forms during the Holocaust, ranging from mild bureaucratic participation to blatant acts of mass murder. Clergy members could even be found in the mobile killing units of the *Einsatzgruppen*.

This pattern is not simply discernible throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. A similar indictment can be made toward Christian institutions in Rwanda. Pointing to the brutalities in Rwanda, Stephen Haynes laments that,

Genocidal Rwanda is an exceedingly unattractive venue for Christian self-examination. There are so many cases where ‘blood’ proved thicker than baptismal water, and so much evidence for religion’s inability to transcend loyalties of class or ethnicity.⁷⁴

These cursory examples accent that once Christian institutions form rigidly constricted boundaries of moral obligation to protect “us” from “them,” their prophetic voice is vitiated, muted, and rendered inefficacious. The devastating result is that churches are found lacking the moral vision and resources needed to thwart genocide (or to even see the need to attempt to do so.).

Finally, the third pattern in the way Christian institutions respond to genocide is “post-genocidal responses,” which is often characterized by drawing attention to the churches’ own persecution and resistance, as well as by the proliferation of official statements that circumvent a direct admission of individual and institutional guilt.⁷⁵ Waller says,

⁷⁴ Stephen R. Haynes, “Death Was Everywhere, Even in the Front of the Church: Christian Faith and the Rwandan Genocide,” in *Confronting Genocide*, 186.

⁷⁵ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 145ff.

Both of these responses allow the Christian church to reallocate its resources (cognitive, rational, and otherwise) away from self-critical analysis of their institutional response to genocide. The problem is not a cognitive simplification or ignorance, but a willful hemorrhaging off of attention elsewhere.⁷⁶

We find this pattern of accentuating the church's persecution and resistance confirmed by Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*. They chronicle two prevalent trends found in the treatment of the historical accounts regarding the German churches and the Third Reich: a myth of resistance and a myth of victimization.⁷⁷

Shelley Baranowski describes how the myth of resistance has been chronicled saying, "Opposition to Nazism has been described in near-mythic terms, as deeds exemplifying extraordinary, if tragic, heroism, unusual moral insights into the 'evils' or 'true' nature of the Nazi regime, and transcendence above mass conformity and repression."⁷⁸ Evolving after the war, this myth of resistance recounted how the German churches took an intrepid stance of opposition against Hitler and Nazi persecution—whenever and wherever such a stance was possible. Likewise, James Waller points out how drawing attention to certain luminaries during this dark time (such as Bonhoeffer, Lichtenberg, Gerstein, Niemoller, etc.) also served to draw attention away from the complicity of the institution, i.e. the church, by extolling the exceptional actions of sterling individuals.⁷⁹

When the historical records clearly show that this chronicle of the churches' heroism and martyrdom was not the case, it was excused due to a dearth of knowledge about the plight of the Jews or on account of the fear of retaliation by Hitler if the churches were to protest openly. In reality, very few church members were outspokenly opposed to Nazi policies of disenfranchisement, deportation and murder. While certainly there are courageous examples of corporate resistance, this opposition was usually in the form of protest against Nazi interference in ecclesial affairs, rather than resistance on behalf of victims of the Nazi regime.

⁷⁶ Waller, "Deliver Us from Evil," 146.

⁷⁷ See the introduction to Ericksen and Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, 1-21.

⁷⁸ Shelley Baranowski, "Consent and Dissent: The Confessing Church and Conservative Opposition to National Socialism," in *Journal of Modern History*, 59:1 (1987), 54.

⁷⁹ Waller, "Deliver Us from Evil," 147.

The second myth which was commonly held in post-war Germany was the victimization or persecution myth. It maintained that National Socialism had its citizens locked in a grip of terror. Thus, the churches in Germany were merely one of many hapless victims of Nazi horror. Citing studies done by Daniel Goldhagen and Christopher Browning, Erickson and Heschel conclude that, in reality, there are no reports of any German being court-martialed, shot, or seriously punished for refusing to carry out an order to murder. Therefore, the pervasive notion that Germans were compelled on pain of death to carry out such crimes is “nothing more than fantasy.”⁸⁰ Erickson and Heschel contend that essentially the executioners felt no qualms about these bloody mass murders, even going as far as inviting friends and loved ones to be spectators of these killings. Therefore, it is simply erroneous to see average German citizens as veritably enslaved to the Nazi regime with no opportunity to offer any kind of disapproval. Erickson and Heschel conclude the evidence substantiates that there was widespread support for Hitler and, for a good portion of the war, enthusiastic approval of the majority of his policies.

Victoria Barnett also sheds light on this victimization phenomenon in Germany pointing to how church leaders in 1945 created an “ethical gray zone as they sought not to understand their behavior or repudiate it, but instead to justify and explain it.”⁸¹ Barnett says in all too many cases this led to a radically new interpretation of their history, a falsified version they could live with in the new post-Nazi context. The result of this falsified historical narrative was that Germans soon began to view themselves as victims of the Nazi regime, and this victimization mentality became the dominant ethical framework through which the churches interpreted their experience under the Third Reich. To illustrate, Barnett points to a sermon entitled “The German Passion” preached in 1947 on Good Friday by theologian Helmut Thielicke. Here Thielicke compared the postwar suffering of the German people with the suffering of Christ on the cross, noting how both were despised, abandoned, and utterly dependent upon the mercy of God. The few vague references to the suffering of the Jews and other victims of Nazism, were “conflated

⁸⁰ Erickson and Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, 2.

⁸¹ Barnett, “The Creation of Ethical ‘Gray Zones’ in the German Protestant Church: reflections on the Historical Quest for Ethical Clarity” in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 363.

into the general rubric of ‘wartime suffering’ a framework that ignored the historical reality of what had happened and erased any sense of personal or collective responsibility for that history.”⁸²

The primary, almost reflexive, response that Christian institutions have in a post-genocidal context is avoidance and denial, as can be evinced in many of the earliest post-Holocaust church statements in the following chapter. James Waller critiques this evasiveness succinctly saying the churches “avoided directly shining a spotlight on the dark recesses of Christian institutional actions before and during genocidal violence.”⁸³ Thus, at an institutional level, Christians have largely avoided a confrontation with their own sinfulness or admission of their own complicity in acts of genocide and violence. As a whole, they have not undertaken any practical, concrete steps toward the reformation of doctrine or practice in order to ensure that such a cataclysmic event will not be repeated.⁸⁴ Analyzing statements from not only the Holocaust but other genocides as well, Waller concludes,

To do reconciliation most effectively...we can no longer avoid asking tough questions of why the church was silent, or complicity, in the face of mass destruction. We can no longer avoid asking why, in the name of God, Christianity has been at the front of defining the “other” throughout human history. It is only in facing such questions that Christian can begin to fulfill its promise and foster periods of tolerance.⁸⁵

VI. AN INTRODUCTION TO EXCLUSION

At the root of this rejection of the Other lies the pernicious practice of exclusion. Because the propensity to exclude is so instinctive and innate, the phrase “impulse toward exclusion” would be more apt. This predisposition, rooted in what Salo W. Baron calls “the dislike of the unlike”⁸⁶ will be explored through the work of

⁸² Barnett, “The Creation of Ethical ‘Gray Zones,’” 364.

⁸³ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 147.

⁸⁴ Waller expands on this observation in “Deliver Us from Evil,” 148-9. For an interesting assessment of concrete examples of apologies and other acts of repentance performed in recent years by ecclesiastical institutions, together with their varied receptions see: Jeremy M. Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront their Sinful Pasts*, (Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2011)

⁸⁵ Waller, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 150.

⁸⁶ In *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ed. (Yale University Press, 2006), 16.

Miroslav Volf and Joerg Rieger. The research of Gabriella Lettini and Michael Steele will elucidate how the structures of exclusion are deeply embedded within Christian theology and Christian history. Finally, exclusion will be illustrated within the concrete, historical context of the purge of otherness within Nazi Germany.

Miroslav Volf offers a wealth of insight into the deadly practice of exclusion. His seminal book *Exclusion and Embrace* offered a thorough analysis of the deadly process of exclusion that engenders contempt and violence, as well as an explication of a posture of embrace that has the potential to cultivate forgiveness and reconciliation. Volf's writing is shaped in the crucible of ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, a locale where questions about otherness and exclusion are seldom posited in abstract terms. Volf describes how the tendency to exclude lurks in the dark regions of the human heart. The penchant for exclusion constitutes the substratum of our society.⁸⁷

We should not reckon that exclusion, and the dangers thereof, are some kind of atavistic excrescence, an erstwhile trait of benighted and parochial beings who have yet to discover more civilized behavior. By no means is exclusion some kind of obsolescent behavior! The deadly practice of exclusion is just as rampant and unrelenting as it was when the horrors of the Holocaust, or Bosnia, or Rwanda unfolded. Volf calls these atrocities "a horrifying testimony to the fact that in many places in our world, the most brutal forms of exclusion are the order of the day."⁸⁸ He admonishes those who imagine they are immune to the dangers of participating in practices of exclusion by virtue of being too civilized or perhaps too rectitudinous. "The practice of exclusion is not just something that the evil and barbaric others do

⁸⁷ It should be noted that I am not advocating that churches indiscriminately endorse or accept all aspects of the otherness of the Other; the Other, like us, is capable of acting in ways that are morally and theologically unsettling and obviously such actions evidence that the practice of exclusion cannot and should not be jettisoned wholesale. Rather, as Volf says, we should use a biblical category, which is 'judgment.' The kind of distance from culture that Volf is advocating "entails a judgment not only against a monochrome character of one's own culture but also against evil in every culture. The new creation that an authentic catholic personality should anticipate is not an indiscriminate affirmation of the present world." Judith M. Gundry Volf and Miroslav Volf. *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 45.

⁸⁸ Volf, "A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion," in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, ed. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 23.

out there; exclusion is also what we, the good and civilized people, do right here where we are.”⁸⁹

Volf adduces that the reasons for exclusion of the Other are manifold, but they spring from an Antaeian impulse to expel anything that disrupts the carefully constructed (constricted) boundaries of our identity. Often exclusion and consequent destruction of the Other results from a latent hatred of our own selves. “‘Others’ become scapegoats,” Volf says, “concocted from our own shadows as repositories of our sins so we can relish the illusion of our sinless superiority.”⁹⁰

Volf describes what he calls the “inner logic” of exclusion, how human beings think and act as they exclude others. At its core, the logic of exclusion has purity as its desideratum. In fact, Volf defines sin, not as corruption or contamination, but as a “certain form of purity—the exclusion of the other from one’s heart and one’s world.”⁹¹ Sin thus constitutes a disavowal to accept the Other in their otherness, demanding instead that they be expelled from our presence and from our world—through whatever means necessary.

Volf highlights three dominant incarnations of exclusion. The first is exclusion by elimination, which can either surface as extermination such as the atrocities enacted under the Third Reich, or as a more “subtle” form of elimination which demands assimilation. This latter more “sophisticated” form of exclusion proffers, “You can survive, even thrive, among us, if you become like us; you can keep your life, if you give up your identity.”⁹²

The second mode of exclusion Volf brings to light is subjugation through domination. This entails assigning the Other a role as second or third class citizens, thereby keeping their power and influence tightly in check. Here an airtight seal is placed around the Other to ensure safety from their influence.

Finally, a third strategy of exclusion is abandonment. Volf likens this to the Levite in the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 who chooses to preserve his ritual purity by disengaging from the needy Other, carefully passing him by at a safe, comfortable distance. Here, Volf makes a compelling point: cold

⁸⁹ Volf, “A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion,” 24.

⁹⁰ Volf “Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 47 (1995), 201.

⁹¹ Volf, “A Spacious Heart,” 49.

⁹² Volf, “A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion,” 24-25.

indifference toward the Other “can be more deadly than hate.”⁹³ Thus, we have Zygmunt Bauman’s telling remark that the mass destruction of Jews “was accompanied not by the uproar of emotions, but the dead silence of unconcern.”⁹⁴

In a similar vein, Joerg Rieger, author of *God and the Excluded*, contends that the inherent tension between inclusion and exclusion is one of the major challenges facing Christian theologians today. Exclusion is not just a social problem, but a theological one with grave implications for the future of theology as a whole.⁹⁵ Rieger’s research elucidates how Christian theology is imbued with patterns of exclusion, or what he calls “blind spots.” He says, “At a time when more and more people are pushed to the margins, theology needs to learn how to deal with the structures of exclusion that define the world today and how to resist that which unconsciously shapes its own disciplines.”⁹⁶

Rieger endeavors to bring these blind spots within Christian theology to the fore by surveying four dominant modes of extant theology with a keen eye to the theme of exclusion. He analyzes several types of theologies: the liberal “Theology of Identity”, represented by the work of Schleiermacher and his turn to the modern self; the “Theology of Difference” shaped particularly by the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and his turn to God as “Wholly Other”; the theme of “Theology and Postmodernity”, which focuses on Lindbeck and dominant structures of language and text; and “Theology and the Excluded” of liberation theology. He assesses the merits of each system based on their ability to be self-critical toward the powers of exclusion.

Although Rieger’s own predilection is for liberation theology, it is clear that none of these four dominant theological modes offers a corrective to the penchant toward exclusion. Rieger’s objective is to incorporate all four of these primary theological approaches into a new paradigm, vivified by a firm commitment to this world’s silenced and excluded. He says, “When all four discourses come together in light of what is repressed, theological reflection becomes a form of listening, of reading between the lines, and of receptivity to that which usually goes unnoticed—a

⁹³ Volf, “A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion,” 26.

⁹⁴ Quoted in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 77.

⁹⁵ Rieger, *God and the Excluded: Vision and Blind Spots in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

⁹⁶ Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 126.

novel approach to the field of systematic theology.”⁹⁷ His work draws attention to both the paucity of extant theological paradigms capable of perceiving these “blind spots,” as well as the need for a theological structure which can begin to combat exclusion in earnest.

Rieger is wary of superficial or facile solutions that attempt to bypass deep reflection on and engagement with these critical blind spots. There is too much at stake to continue blithely doing theology as usual. He says,

Resistance to the powers of exclusion and the call for more inclusive structures has nothing to do with common sentiments to provide handouts, be nicer, or be more welcoming to excluded others, attitudes that pervade in much of North American church and societal culture. Simply trying to alleviate the results of exclusion without facing our own complicity will no longer do. Without awareness of our blind spots and what shapes us unconsciously, we will not be able to overcome the current impasse in theological reflection.⁹⁸

Rieger is hopeful that theological reflection will find its mirror image in the churches and he sees great significance for ecclesiology and Christian practice if the deeply ingrained strongholds of exclusion can be eradicated. He says, “Theology that develops resistance to the powers of exclusion may help to develop new models that prove useful in restructuring not only the process of theological reflection but also the church, and, ultimately, even society at large.”⁹⁹

VII. OTHERNESS WITHIN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Gabriella Lettini investigates this omnipresent aversion to the Other within Christian theology, and more extensively within the Western world. Her research is a penetrative contribution to the theme of otherness, arguing that a dominant feature of Western theology is its propensity to erase otherness, either by assimilation or by annihilation. Lettini’s reflections emerge out of her own experience of being “Other.”¹⁰⁰ She recounts,

⁹⁷ Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 162.

⁹⁸ Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 10.

⁹⁹ Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Lettini is part of the Waldensian Church in Italy, direct descendants of the “heretical” movement born in the 12th century and persecuted throughout the centuries.

I came to see my own story as just an infinitesimal part of a much broader picture of the history of the Western world—from witch-hunts, to the crusades, to the missionary conquest of the Americas, the Middle Passage, and the Holocaust—a history of suppression of the other.¹⁰¹

Lettini is haunted by the conundrum of how Christians can worship a God they call “Other” and simultaneously behave in ways that suppress the human Other.¹⁰² She strives to discover whether Christians are irredeemably infected by the “allergy to the other” that pervades Western culture, or whether they are capable of respecting the Other *qua* Other and eschewing all efforts to annihilate or assimilate him/her.¹⁰³

Throughout her dissertation, Lettini focuses on the work of Levinas and Rosenzweig and their use of the metaphor of sickness to describe Western society’s dominant stance towards otherness. She quotes Levinas saying, “Philosophy is afflicted, from its childhood, with an insurmountable allergy: a horror for the other who remains other.”¹⁰⁴ Lettini sees a single overarching theme in the works of both Levinas and Rosenzweig—the philosophical tradition of the West has systematically suppressed alterity. She believes Levinas and Rosenzweig offer a keen critique that challenges Western philosophy and theology to re-envision its troublesome relation with the Other.

Lettini narrates how the history of the West has a tragic record of translating this “allergy to the other” into practices such as genocide, slavery, and oppression. She shrewdly emphasizes that our ideology about otherness has a radical effect on the way we act in the world. “Any theology that does not take into consideration the question of its others as a primary concern ends up forgetting, excluding, silencing or oppressing its ‘others,’” she says.¹⁰⁵

The bulk of her dissertation is an assessment of the work of Karl Barth, James H. Cone, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Delores S. Williams, and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. These scholars, though hailing from diverse eras, contexts,

¹⁰¹ Lettini, Ph.D. dissertation, “The ‘Allergy to the Other’: Christian Theology and Its ‘Others’ in Modern Western Theological Discourses,” vii.

¹⁰² Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” viii.

¹⁰³ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 55.

¹⁰⁴ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” ix.

¹⁰⁵ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 10.

and theological perspectives, labor vigorously towards a “diagnosis of a severe malaise in Western philosophy, theology, and culture at large.”¹⁰⁶ They strive to discover some sort of remedy or inoculation for the insidious allergy to the Other. While each of these perceptive scholars writes from a profound awareness of the baneful tendency to silence the Other, Lettini discerns subtle ways in which even these scholars are not “immune from the hegemonic tendencies of Western thought.”¹⁰⁷ In a manner similar to Rieger, Lettini’s assessment spurs us to question whether there is any hope to overcome the ubiquitous “allergy to the other” if even those scholars who most articulately and passionately endeavor to diagnose it and cure it, are ultimately unable to completely triumph over it.

Lettini acknowledges that Western churches and theologians have begun the painful and complex process of coming to terms with their past, but there is still a shortsightedness toward the most fundamental categories we use to grapple with otherness in Western cultures. In her section entitled “Strategies to ease the allergy to the other,” Lettini maintains that we must renounce the tempting notion that this malady is insuperable, or that some sort of panacea can be discovered. She believes this stance resonates back to Levinas’ metaphor of an allergy. Typically, the allergy is not something that can be thoroughly remedied. While it is possible to alleviate the symptoms of an allergy through medication or calculated life choices, one is not easily cured from the allergy itself. The same is true in dealing with the allergy to the Other, which is a sickness profoundly embedded in Western culture, harboring polyvalent complexities and capable of transmogrifying into a plethora of forms.

Lettini does offer some salutary suggestions for mitigating the pervasive allergy to the Other, such as (1) cultivating dialogue and understanding across different perspectives and communities, (2) using sources that challenge what Lettini calls “white male normativity”¹⁰⁸ and open us up to hear previously silenced and marginalized voices, and (3) challenging traditional models and constructions of the self and of identity which are still embedded in much of Western Christian theology.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, Lettini concludes that the quest to discover some kind of

¹⁰⁶ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 228.

¹⁰⁷ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 227.

¹⁰⁸ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 235.

¹⁰⁹ Lettini also says that theological discourse needs to be constantly reminded that God is always ‘other’ than any particular perspective. This helps us not to mistake our perspective for ultimate truths.

universal theoretic response to the problem of the allergy to the other “would not only be doomed to fail but would also be inherently misguided as yet another totalizing and therefore hegemonic project.”¹¹⁰

We will now briefly turn to an exploration of the problem of otherness within the narrative of Christian history. Michael Steele’s work describes how the substratum of a rejection of otherness is an overwhelming part of the history of the Christian faith. Steele traces seventeen centuries of Christian history, moving from Imperial Rome, to the post-Constantine era, to the Crusades, the Inquisition, contact with indigenous peoples, slavery in the Americas, and finally to the Holocaust. His contention is that “Christianity has perpetrated a ceaseless series of violent actions against The Other since its ascension to a position of preeminence with Imperial Rome.”¹¹¹ Steele analyzes each of these dark periods of Christian history through the prism of an ideology of exclusion and “sacred violence” against the Other, which he sees as culminating in the Holocaust. He says a compelling case may be made for

a definite line of intent running from the late fourth century until the twentieth century in which there are very clear indications that institutional Christianity was quite willing to exercise all the considerable power at its command to change or destroy the Other whenever and wherever encountered.¹¹²

Steele claims the bulk of scholarship on the Holocaust has analyzed the event predominantly in terms of a “terrible rupture in Western culture and civilization.”¹¹³ This theory of the Holocaust as a rupture of some sort will be the contention he wishes to refute throughout the entire work. Rather, the Holocaust, even with its important distinguishing features, was the culminating point of a cultural trajectory spanning at least seventeen centuries. Western Europe’s Christian culture and

Also, theology should be done with a focus on the concrete experiences of suffering, oppression, struggle and liberation of people, rather than with a focus merely on abstract, universal ideas about God or humanity. Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 232.

¹¹⁰ Lettini, “The ‘Allergy’ to the Other,” 228.

¹¹¹ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 8.

¹¹² Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 93.

¹¹³ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, xi. For example, Emil Fackenheim wrote about the Holocaust as an almost total rupture in the fabric of Western civilization and of the Christian faith itself. See Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

civilization did not take a detour, fail, or simply collapse; the Holocaust was not a caesura of some sort or an “interruption of theology’s stream of ideas,” as the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz has called it.¹¹⁴ “Indeed, operating as [it was] designed to do for centuries” states Steele, “Christianity, achieved an unparalleled peak of efficiency in the genocide of human ‘gardening’ in the Nazi death camps.”¹¹⁵ Steele contends there is great continuity with other acts of brutality toward the Other which he calls the “cultural blueprint’s linkages to the Shoah.”¹¹⁶ Exclusion and heterophobia, i.e. hatred of the other, were not a unique invention of Nazi philosophy—some kind of Swastika-garbed monster *aus Deutschland*. Rather, the seeds of genocide and hatred of the Other were latent in the soil of Germany even before Hitler came to power.

Steele isolates what he calls the “master cultural narrative of triumphalism, supersessionism, and transcendence” which he contends Christianity employed as a means to demarcate who resided within or without the boundaries of moral obligation.¹¹⁷ Those who found themselves outside this circle were demonized and anathematized as subhuman infidels or heretics. Steele concludes,

All the seemingly countless small measures taken toward dehumanizing the Other over the centuries of Christian domination and power left not a chasm to be crossed but just a small, incremental step to take for perpetrators and bystanders in the Holocaust.¹¹⁸

While objections can certainly be raised regarding some of Steele’s historical claims and his methodology,¹¹⁹ his examination spotlights critical behavioral patterns throughout Christian history which can be seen as foreshadowing the purge of otherness which culminated under the Third Reich.

¹¹⁴ Metz, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust*, Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig eds., (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 13.

¹¹⁵ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 127.

¹¹⁶ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Steele, *Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust*, 130.

¹¹⁹ See, for example John Conway’s review of Steele in *Church History Journal* 72:4 (2003), 895-896.

VIII. THE PURGE OF OTHERNESS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After reflection on the virulent progression of otherization, as well as the conceptual and practical challenges of exclusion and otherness for Christian theology, we will conclude the chapter with a portrayal of the process of otherization within the concrete, historical context of Nazi Germany beginning in the early 1930s. By contextualizing otherization within the narrative of human suffering, it will become clear how imperative these issues are for contemporary ecclesiology.

As previously suggested, a rabid phobia of the Other was not a Nazi invention, but a deeply ingrained, universal proclivity of human nature which was exacerbated in the fertile soil of the Weimer republic. While the Nazi worldview defined a number of groups as outside its universe of concern, there was particularly no room for the Jewish Other. The Nazis were convinced that the Jews were the “dregs of humanity” and could not envision even a minimally useful function for Jews to play within the Third Reich. Max Weinreich portrays this aptly:

The Jew could be represented as the embodiment of everything to be resented, feared, or despised. He was a carrier of bolshevism but curiously enough, he simultaneously stood for the liberal spirit of rotten Western democracy. Economically, he was both capitalist and socialist. He was blamed as the indolent pacifist but, by strange coincidence, he was also the eternal instigator to wars.¹²⁰

James Glass provides a harrowing account of the way ordinary Germans capitulated to and ultimately disseminated an ideology imbued with hatred towards the Other. The Nazis preyed on long-established racial phobias, ultimately institutionalizing these phobias into a set of “psychotic practices” and sanctioned laws which bore a semblance of normalcy and sensibility. Glass explores the interrelated themes of paranoia and hate, which were significant psychological forces in the Holocaust. He contends that paranoia and hate spring from an internally conflicted self that experiences a part of itself as strange or abject. Rather than confronting this painful side, the self externalizes the rage towards the Other.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People* (New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute, 1946), 28.

¹²¹ James M. Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life: Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler's Germany* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 124.

Glass describes this rage toward the Other using the word abjection, which designates a judgment regarding what is pure and impure, moral and immoral. The logic of abjection looks this way:

I do not see my actions towards the other as violent, as an assault on a human body, because the other possesses no human properties. I am attacking matter, dangerous matter; therefore, I will protect myself from this other's abjection, poison, and corrosion. I kill the other because I fear being polluted or defiled by him.¹²²

Abjection represents a pervasive phobia with the power to rewrite reality and the proclivity to write off the Jews from within the margins of society.

Abjection encapsulates what took place toward the Jewish Other. When Hitler took over the chancellorship of Germany in early 1933, the Nazis estimated the “fully Jewish” population of Germany to be approximately 550,000, or about one percent of population.¹²³ In the very early years of the Third Reich, the Nazis began to gauge public opinion and the possibility of outrage by church people through a series of events that can be seen as foreshadowing the terror of the Holocaust. In 1933, boycotts of Jewish business were organized and the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” effectively excluded non-Aryans from Civil positions. In 1935, Jews were disenfranchised through the imposition of the Nuremberg Laws. Through increasingly barbaric measures such as euthanasia of those deemed unfit for life, forced sterilization, ghettoization, gradual deportation, and numerous pogroms, the worst of which was Crystal Night on 9 November 1938 when the Nazis could be certain that no one was willing to stand up for those deemed outsiders.¹²⁴ Rubenstein recounts this stating,

¹²² James M. Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life*, 121.

¹²³ This estimate includes some 50,000 nonreligious Jews who fit the standard of Nazi racial criteria. Additionally, there were approximately 750,000 Jewish Germans of mixed racial ancestry, many of these converts to Christianity. Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 11.

¹²⁴ Regarding *Kristallnacht*, Guenter Lewy writes, “The hands-off policy of the Church stood out especially in the fateful days of November 1938...During the night of November 9-10, the display windows of Jewish shops all over Germany were shattered, about twenty thousand male Jews were arrested and herded into concentration camps, 191 synagogues were set on fire and 76 others completely destroyed....36 Jews were killed during this well-organized action; a much larger number succumbed to the sadistic treatment meted out to them in Buchenwald and other concentration camps where they were imprisoned. (The reaction of the Church was that) bishops remained silent in the face

The loss of legal rights rendered the Jews a 'surplus population, and as such they were expendable: either as a slave-labour force, or as a target for extermination. The history of the twentieth century has taught us that people who are rendered permanently superfluous are eventually condemned to segregated precincts of the living dead or are exterminated outright.¹²⁵

In a similar manner, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman notes that the Jews

had been removed from the horizon of German daily life, cut off from the network of personal intercourse, transformed in practice into exemplars of a category, of a stereotype—into the abstract concept of the *metaphysical Jew*. Until, that is, they had ceased to be those 'others' to whom moral responsibility normally extends, and lost the protection which such natural morality offers.¹²⁶

The groundwork for the Jewish people to be excluded from the human community was established centuries before the Holocaust. The stigmatization of Jewish traditions, habits, images and vocabularies ensured that the image of "the vile and diabolical Jew" was woven into the fabric of European culture. Robert Wistrich sheds light on image of the Jew in Nazi German saying,

In the Nazi Weltanschauung, the 'otherness' of the Jew now became absolute and all the more ominous because he had penetrated into the very heart of German culture. An otherness which was seemingly indefinable, amorphous, infinitely fluid and capable of endless adaption while supposedly retaining its own unchanging 'racial' integrity. Perceived as the protean carriers of an evil essence, the Jew therefore appeared in Nazi eyes as the incarnation of the powers of darkness. As a superhuman and subhuman threat, Judaism and Jewry were figuratively transformed into universal carriers of death, whose annihilation was the precondition for the salvation of humanity."¹²⁷

Through this process of abjection, the Jewish people came to be increasingly regarded as absolute Other, a people on the fringes of Europe's universe of moral obligation. The Nazis skillfully perfected the art of "making invisible the very

of the burning temples and the first round-up for the Jews." *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 284.

¹²⁵ Rubenstein, *Cunning of History*, 96.

¹²⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 189.

¹²⁷ Wistrich, *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia* (Taylor & Francis, 1999) 10.

humanity of the victims,”¹²⁸ ensuring that Jews existed wholly outside the realm of ethical responsibility. J.K. Roth says that only when we understand how *natural* it was for Christians to abandon the Jews and others who were persecuted under the reign of the Third Reich “can we grasp the magnitude of the gap that needs to be closed between them and the enormity of the indifference that always underwrites powers that will harm defenseless persons.”¹²⁹

In order to portray the extensiveness of the destructive penchant toward expunging otherness even inside the walls of the Christian church, we turn to explore some dynamics of the imbroglio often referred to as the *Kirchenkampf* (Church struggle), which took place in Nazi Germany from 1933-1945. An examination of the German Christian Movement, whose members came to be called German Christians,¹³⁰ evinces how susceptible Christian individuals and institutions are to being captivated by an ideology of abjection of the Other.

The German Christians desired a form of ecclesiastical apartheid which sought to eradicate anything from the church that was redolent of weakness and vulnerability—anything that did not encapsulate their vision of the prime German specimen. Doris Bergen describes their vision for a “manly” ecclesiology saying “German nature demanded a ‘fighting Christ’ not ‘a cowardly sufferer’ who assumed the guilt of others and turned the other cheek to his enemies.”¹³¹ The German Christians arduously ventured to build a church that would occlude all those deemed impure and embrace all “true Germans” in a spiritual homeland for the Third Reich.¹³² Bergen explains how for the German Christians the church was the locus of a fusion of blood and race rather than a diverse fellowship evoked through the calling

¹²⁸ Zygmund Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 26.

¹²⁹ John K. Roth, “On the Impossibility and Necessity of Being a Christian: Post-Holocaust Reflections Based on the Thought of Jean Amery and Emil Fackenheim,” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4:3 (1989): 299.

¹³⁰ Excellent English language introductions to the history of the German Christians can be found in John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933-1945* (New York: Wiedenfeld and Nicolas, 1968); Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); and James A. Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors: A Study of the Ideas of Three Deutsche Christen Groups* (Missoula: American Academy of Religion, 1976). For a concise summary of the ideology of the German Christian Movement see Doris Bergen’s essay “Storm Troopers for Christ” and Susannah Heschel, “When Jesus Was an Aryan” in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

¹³¹ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 74.

¹³² Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 4.

and ministry of the Holy Spirit. A sharp dichotomy was erected between an earthly church, rooted in the soil and sweat of the German people—and a more universal, spiritual church. By rigidly underscoring this dichotomy, members of the German Christians could profess membership in an ethereal, worldwide church, while assiduously toiling to cultivate its antithesis in the Third Reich.¹³³

The German Christian movement saw National Socialism and Christianity as “mutually reinforcing” and saw in National Socialism “a great opportunity for the revival of true Christianity.”¹³⁴ The desideratum of the German Christian movement was a Christian faith that was *Judenrein*. For Christianity to be harmonious to the *Weltanschauung* of the Nazi party a new brand of Aryan Christianity was needed—a Teutonically-sanitized version of Christianity. This *Volkskirche* would unshackle the German people from the Jews and all things Jewish.

The mission of making “Aryanization” palatable to the average German was taken up by the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, founded in 1939. The Institute aimed to make the churches partners in the Nazi war against Jewry. Heschel depicts the works of this institution as a radical “Dejudaization” of the Christian faith through a recreation of de-Judaized versions of the New Testament, hymnals, catechisms and other liturgical works.¹³⁵ This movement also created creeds which boldly denied the canonicity of the Old Testament and even went as far as to say Jesus was actually of Galilean, not Jewish, descent. The Institute’s Aryan Jesus was envisioned as a Warrior Crusader, devoted to ridding the world of all semblances of Judaism. Thus, the Institute was able to “effectively reframed Nazism as the very fulfillment of Christianity” and by doing this to “erase moral objections to Nazi antisemitism.”¹³⁶ The Institute was enormously successful and enthusiastically embraced by the majority of Germany’s Christians. Heschel highlights how many of its leading figures were university

¹³³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 10.

¹³⁴ Susannah Heschel, “When Jesus Was an Aryan,” in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 78. Also, see Ericksen’s *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (Yale University Press, 1987) for a shocking account of how three of Germany’s theological paragons of excellence welcomed the rise of National Socialism with outstretched arms.

¹³⁵ For a detailed account of the Institute, see Heschel’s “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,” in *Church History* 63:4 (1994): 587-605.

¹³⁶ Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 17.

professors who utilized “scholarly” conferences, publications and lectures to give their work a veneer of academic credibility.

Bergen chronicles how adherents of this “Aryan” brand of Christianity quickly captured virtually all of the Protestant theological faculties and the majority of church government positions. Thus, as Hitler’s Final Solution was taking place in Germany and beyond, what Bergen calls an “ecclesiastical final solution” was occurring within the walls of Germany’s churches.

This brief sketch of the purge of otherness has endeavored to illuminate how the very *raison d’être* of the Third Reich was the annihilation of the Other. Its highest aim was *Gleichschaltung*, a comprehensive process of synchronization to bring all over German society in line with Nazi ideology. This homogenization sought not only the eradication of the Jewish people—but desired nothing less than the wholesale destruction of otherness. At a time when the Other was most weak and voiceless, the church found itself incapable of confronting the lethal forces of *Gleichschaltung* which sought to stamp out all traces of the Other.

IX. CONCLUSION

This chapter surveyed the nature, problem, and potential of otherness, noting the prevalent tendency to reject and exclude the Other, as well as underscoring ways in which the Christian church is particularly susceptible to the perils of otherization. After a description of the Other and an explanation of how the virulent process of otherization unfolds, some dynamics of exclusion were uncovered, revealing that exclusion is part of a broader, systemic problem of an “allergy to the Other.” The section also probed into how deeply the tendency toward exclusion is entrenched in our very DNA and particularly in our ways of being church. Through a synopsis of the purge of otherness in Nazi Germany, it highlighted how susceptible Christian institutions are this allergy to the Other and how devastating a rejection of otherness can be for the moral and prophetic witness of the churches. These reflections on otherness and exclusion will serve as the conceptual lens and groundwork for the rest of what follows.

CHAPTER II: TRENDS WITHIN CHRISTIAN POST-HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY

The sincere Christian knows what died in Auschwitz was not the Jewish people but Christianity.¹

This chapter will survey a selection of reports, statements, and studies from Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as from ecumenical assemblies such as the WCC. It will portray how Christian churches in Europe and North America have understood and engaged with Christianity's role during the Holocaust, as well as how the churches have re-envisioned Christian theology and practice in the post-Holocaust era. The chapter will also introduce the genre known as Holocaust theology, highlight its objectives and characteristics, and briefly examine the contributions which leading scholars within this genre have made toward a post-Holocaust reformation of Christian theology.

I. SUMMARY OF POST-HOLOCAUST ECCLESIAL STATEMENTS

A. Introduction

The metamorphosis in the churches' conception of their relationship with the Jewish people constitutes one of the most profound shifts within Christian theology since the Protestant Reformation. So radical a change has taken place since the Holocaust that Johann-Baptist Metz has characterized it as a "revision of Christian theology itself."² This section offers a chronological survey of reports, statements, and studies from Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as from ecumenical assemblies such as the WCC, in order to trace the general trajectory in which the churches are moving in confessing their faith in relation to the Jewish people in a post-Holocaust context.³

¹ Elie Wiesel in Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger for all Humanity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 171.

² Quoted in John T. Pawlikowski, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission" in Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt eds., *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish Christian Dialogue* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) 61.

³ When connected with theology the phrase "post-Holocaust" can have either a simple chronological meaning, (i.e. theological reflection which is historically, contextually situated after the Holocaust) or a more qualitative meaning (i.e. theological reflection in which traditional Christian concepts have been fundamental and irrevocably shattered by the reality of the Holocaust.) The way I am using the

This survey will enable us to see the wider picture of how various churches as institutions are reflecting on the Holocaust and its meaning. I will explore in particular (1) how Christian churches have understood and engaged with Christianity's role during the Holocaust, particularly how they assess their failure to engage on behalf of victims of the Nazi regime. And resultantly, what answers are given for the reasons behind this failure. I will also explore (2) how churches have proceeded to reform ecclesial teaching in light of these conceptions.

I have chosen to include a wide range of voices here in order to show that the patterns I will be highlighting in the next chapter are not isolated anomalies but dominant trends within the landscape of Christian post-Holocaust theology. There is rich theological diversity evident in post-Holocaust church statements, and this distinctiveness deserves significantly more attention than can be allotted here.⁴ My concern is to sketch the primary developments and trends that can be discerned from these statements in order to ascertain some dynamics regarding what the churches are saying. Clark Williamson has called the post-Holocaust teaching documents of the churches "revolutionary confessions,"⁵ emphasizing the sharp contrast between what was said in the past regarding Jews and Judaism and what is being said now. Likewise, Paul Van Buren analyzes this dramatic theological reversal saying, "There has been building a series of statements by ecclesiastical authorities of ever-increasing clarity and penetration which have been moving in the direction of a frank contradiction of our interpretation of the past eighteen centuries."⁶

phrase "post-Holocaust" here denotes the first meaning, and is not reflective of the radical nature in which so-called Holocaust theologians use "post-Holocaust" to mean that the Holocaust constitutes a total and systematic assault on many of Christianity's theological presuppositions. The latter understanding will be explored in the second part of this chapter.

⁴ For excellent compilations of church statements see Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London: Stimulus Books, 1977) and *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations: an Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents, 1975-1983* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Rolf Rendtorff und Hans Hermann Henrix, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1945-1985* (München: Paderborn, 1988), and in Hans Hermann Henrix und Wolfgang Kraus, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1985 bis 2000*, 2 (München: Paderborn, 2000); Franklin Sherman, *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Volume One, The Road to Reconciliation (1945-1985)* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011) and *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Volume Two: Building a New Relationship (1986-2013)* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014)

⁵ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 27.

⁶ Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality: Part I: Discerning the Way* (New York: Seabury Press: 1980), 174.

The bulk of the documents considered here stem from a North American and Northern European context, simply because this is where the majority of the relevant post-Holocaust scholarship has taken place.⁷ In addition, some of these statements are issued by higher ecclesiastical echelons and bear much official authority for the churches, as is the case of *Nostra Aetate*, whereas others are simply study papers or documents by smaller, “free church” denominations. Yet all of them have significance as windows into the perception of the churches as they reflect upon their relationship with the Jewish people in light of the Holocaust. All have the capacity to elicit dialogue, re-envision theological categories, and bring these critical issues to light for the churches.

The original intention of this work was to limit the survey to documents which explicitly mention the Holocaust (or Shoah), but unfortunately documents which contained such explicitness were fewer than was expected.⁸ I work under the assumption that in the selected documents, even when the Holocaust is not specifically mentioned, this event forms the theological and historical backdrop for the reconceptualization that is taking place within these documents.

⁷ A few examples of statements which originate from other than North America and Europe are: “Orientations for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue” by the National Commission for Catholic-Jewish Religious Dialogue: National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, 1983, and “Holocaust-Shoah: Its Effects on Christian Theology and Life In Argentina and Latin America” Buenos Aires, May 17th, 2006. While the Orthodox churches have issued few official statements on Jewish-Christian dialogue, they have participated in statements formulated by the WCC since they became members in 1961. For more see George Papademetriou, *Essays on Orthodox Christian-Jewish Relations* (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1990). Some joint Jewish/Orthodox statements have been produced. See Rolf Rendtorff und Hans Hermann Henrix, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1945-1985* (Paderborn, Germany: Kaiser, 1988) 691ff and 705ff. An engaging Orthodox Church statement which directly addresses antisemitism and the horrors of the Holocaust is *To Recognize Christ in His People*. It was the final declaration of the Christian Roundtable of Eastern Orthodox priests and cultural representatives from Greece, Georgia, Italy, Russia, and Ukraine visiting Jerusalem, April 20-24, 2007. It speaks specifically of antisemitism, lamenting that “even after the death of six million people anti-Semites feel no guilt.” The document also bewails the swelling tide of antisemitism, particularly in Muslim and former Communist countries and characterizes antisemitism as a “poison that contaminates a Christian soul.” Even more arresting are the words, “He who in our day uses the word ‘Jew’ as a curse lies when he calls himself a Christian.” The Holocaust is described in equally power terms, as “an obvious sign that points at the anti-Christ nature of the replacement theology.” See: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/e-orthodox/1011-eoroundtable2007june1>. Also for insights into the Russian Orthodox perspective see “The Relevance of Western Post-Holocaust Theology to the Thought and Practice of the Russian Orthodox Church” a paper given at the second conference on “Theology after Auschwitz and the Gulag” (St Petersburg, 1998) by Sergei Hackel published in *Sobornost* 20:1 (1998). For a survey of resources within Asian liberation theology which reflect on issues raised by the Holocaust and Holocaust theology see Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, chapter 11 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004)

⁸ For example the Holocaust is not explicitly mentioned within conciliar documents of the Roman Catholic Church until the promulgation of the Vatican’s *We Remember* in the year 1998.

Finally, it should be noted that this chapter will be primarily descriptive in nature; a more critical analysis will begin in the next chapter as these trends are elucidated more clearly through an interface with a rejection of otherness.

1. THE EVOLUTION OF ECCLESIAL STATEMENTS SINCE 1945

Scholars generally agree that the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the post-Holocaust context can be roughly divided into three broad phases.⁹ The first stage began in the immediate wake of the Second World War and was characterized by a general sense of shock and paralysis as the enormity of Holocaust began to be disclosed. At this time, the German nation and churches had only just begun the complex process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) and many of the church statements issued during this time were characterized by evasiveness, denial, and a tone of victimization. The second phase, which began in the 1960s, witnessed the first official encounters of Christians and Jews, and the 1970s and 1980s brought about a proliferation in confessional ecclesial statements that began to gradually confront and combat Christianity's long-standing legacy of antisemitism. The third stage began in the early 1980s as scholars and theologians of Christian-Jewish relations began actively engaging with ecclesial statements and continued the arduous task of theological revisionism in the wake of the Holocaust.

2. THE TEN POINTS OF SEELISBERG (1947)

While this chapter is concerned primarily with Christian ecclesial statements, the task of tracing the history of Christian-Jewish dialogue within the churches must begin with the joint Jewish-Christian statement *The Ten Points of Seelisberg*, which formed the cornerstone for Jewish-Christian relations and served as a beacon of what was to come.

In the summer of 1947, the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCCJ) met in Seelisberg, Switzerland to host a conference dedicated to contending against the scourge of antisemitism, still pervasive throughout post-World War II

⁹ See for example, Rolf Rendtorff "Der Dialog hat erst begonnen", in Manfred Görg et al., *Christen und Juden im Gespräch: Eine Bilanz nach 40 Jahren Staat Israel* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1989), 41-55.

Europe.¹⁰ Here, sixty-five Christian and Jewish delegates from nineteen different countries drew up *The Ten Points of Seelisberg*, a document that would “have a historic impact as the initial institutional assault on antisemitism.”¹¹ Seelisberg was the first attempt by Jews and Christians from a variety of traditions to dialogue openly about the malady of antisemitism, as well as the implications of the Holocaust. In spite of its brevity, *The Ten Points of Seelisberg* portends the theological metamorphosis that was to transpire within the churches. The document’s ten theses¹² concern praxis rather than theory; they outline concrete steps that Christians must take in order to jettison negative images of Judaism and eradicate all vestiges of antisemitism within Christian teaching or preaching.

The first four points of the document emphasize positive aspects which Jews and Christians have in common: (1) one God speaks to all through both the Old and New Testaments; (2) Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel; (3) the first disciples, apostles, and martyrs were Jewish; and (4) the primary commandment of Christianity, to love God and one’s neighbor, is incumbent upon both Christians and Jews without exception.¹³

The subsequent six points each begin with the admonition to “avoid” and flow directly from the positive proclamations in the first four points. These points make clear that Christians must stop formulating their identity over and against the Jewish people, if the roots of antisemitism are ever to be deracinated from the Christian faith. The points caution: (5) avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism by extolling Christianity; (6) avoid using the words *Jews* in the exclusive sense to designate the enemies of Jesus, nor the words *the enemies of*

¹⁰ Victoria Barnett describes the eclectic nature of the gathering: Jews, Protestants, Catholic and Orthodox Christians were present, and among them were clergy, laity, community leaders, scholars, and social activists. She highlights how many of the Jewish leaders had themselves been deeply and personally affected by antisemitism. “Seelisberg: An Appreciation,” 56, in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 2:2 (2007): 34-53.

¹¹ Donald Dietrich, *God and Humanity in Auschwitz: Jewish-Christian Relations and Sanctioned Murder* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 62.

¹² These points were substantially influenced by the work of Jules Isaac who presented the conclusion of his 600 page work on the roots of antisemitism, *Jesus and Israel*, to the Seelisberg delegates. Isaac provided the commission with a study document entitled “The Rectification Necessary In Christian Teaching: Eighteen Points,” which served as the basis for the ten points of Seelisberg and was issued internationally later that year in Switzerland.

¹³ International Council of Christians and Jews, “The Ten Points of Seelisberg” (1947). Quoted from Christian Rutishauser, “The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue” in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 2:2 (2007): 34-53.

Jesus to designate the Jewish people as a whole; (7) avoid presenting the passion of Jesus in a way that reaps loathing upon all Jews or upon the Jews alone (in fact, it is not all the Jews alone who are responsible, for the Cross reveals we are all sinners). Parents should be especially mindful not to present the passion story in a way that would implant an aversion to the Jews in the minds of those who hear it; (8) avoid referring to the curses in scripture, and the cry of the angry mob, “*His blood be upon us and upon our children*,” without remembering the more weighty words of our Lord, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*”; (9) avoid upholding the idea that the Jewish people are accursed or destined for suffering; and (10) avoid speaking of the Jewish people as if the first members of the Church were not Jews.¹⁴

Seelisberg was a “benchmark in the history of interreligious relations”¹⁵ according to Victoria Barnett. She continues, “In less than six hundred words, it establishes the parameters of post-Holocaust Christian belief, listing those elements of Christian belief and teaching that historically have been most directly responsible for fostering hatred of Jews...”¹⁶ Similar approbation is made by Christian Rutishauser who says that when, “looking back at the Seelisberg Conference from our contemporary vantage point, “it is remarkable to note with what farsightedness and socio-political realism the participants were able to lay a foundation for the Jewish-Christian dialogue and for the fight against anti-Semitism.”¹⁷ Seelisberg’s unprecedented confrontation with the cancer of antisemitism would serve as a lodestar for Christian-Jewish relations, and provide a solid conceptual scaffolding on which church leaders and scholars would continue to build in subsequent years.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid. The Seelisberg conference goes on to make the following pedagogical suggestions immediately after these ten points: “The introduction or development in school instruction and elsewhere, at each stage, of a more sympathetic and more profound study of biblical and post-biblical history of the Jewish people, as well as of the Jewish problem. In particular the promotion of the spread of this knowledge by publications adapted to all classes of Christian people to ensure the correction of anything in Christian publications and above all in educational handbooks, which would be in conflict with the above principles. Our common endeavors are inspired by the spirit of the words of St. Paul in Romans xi, 28-29: ‘They are beloved for the fathers’ sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance’.”

¹⁵ Seelisberg: An Appreciation,” 56, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 2:2 (2007): 34-53.

¹⁶ Ibid, 55.

¹⁷ International Council of Christians and Jews, “The Ten Points of Seelisberg” (1947). Quoted from Christian Rutishauser, “The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue” in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*: vol. 2:2 (2007): 34-53.

¹⁸ In July 2007 a Jewish-Christian scholarly colloquium was hosted in Central Switzerland to commemorate the Sixtieth Anniversary of Seelisberg. For the text of the new ten-point 2007 Seelisberg declaration. See Rutishauser, “The 1947 Seelisberg Conference,” 48-49.

B. Roman Catholic Ecclesial Statements

Although the Holocaust would not be explicitly mentioned within official Roman Catholic statements until 1998, there is a substantial and proliferating corpus of Roman Catholic teaching on the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people.¹⁹ Four seminal documents in particular will be highlighted here because they are indicative of the sea change in Roman Catholic thinking about the Jewish people and are considered some of the most authoritative documents on the matter. After highlighting central themes within these four statements, the contribution of Pope John Paul II to Jewish-Catholic relations as well as amendments to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will be briefly discussed.

1. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S *DECLARATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS, NOSTRA AETATE*
(OCTOBER 28, 1965)

The Christian faith has been characterized by a long and pervasive tradition of animosity towards the Jewish people and their religion, and a suspicious and triumphalist posture towards other faith traditions as well. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a watershed event in the history of the 20th century church

¹⁹ For other significant Roman Catholic documents and statements see *Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations*, U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1967); *Memorandum by the Christian-Jewish Coordinating Committee of Vienna and Statement of the Diocesan Synod of Vienna* (1968); *The Statement by the French Bishops' Committee for Relations with Jews* (1973); *Statement on Catholic Jewish Relations by the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops* (1975); *Study Outline on the Mission and Witness of the Church*, Venice (1977); *The Church and the Jews [West]* German Bishops' Conference Bonn, (1980); *Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion* (1988); *NCCB Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Preaching* (1988); *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations* (1992); *Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel* (1993); *Statement of the German Catholic Bishops 50th Anniversary of Auschwitz Liberation* (1995); *Statement of the Polish Catholic Bishops 50th Anniversary of Auschwitz Liberation* (1995); *Statement by the Catholic Bishops in the Netherlands, Supported by One 'Root'* (1995); *Statement by Catholic 'Bishops' Conference, Role of Switzerland During WWII* (1997); and *Declaration of Repentance by the Roman Catholic Bishops of France* (1997). In addition, dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people is undertaken by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC). Catholic representatives are from the Holy See's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews. Jewish representatives are from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), composed of the World Jewish Congress, the Synagogue Council of America, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International-Anti-Defamation League, and the Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations.

regarding the relationship of Catholic Christians to non-Christians. The Council's pioneering *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (better known as *Nostra Aetate* meaning "In our Time") served as a catalyst for a radical process of theological self-examination and ecclesial reformation and began what Clark Williamson called "a veritable revolution in the churches' teaching about Jews and Judaism."²⁰

In the first section of the document, the council speaks of the Church's task of promoting unity and love, a task which is rooted in "what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship." *Nostra Aetate* affirms the unity and common origin of all peoples as sharing one Creator God. It describes the "unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men."²¹ The document mentions some of the answers which religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and members of other faiths have given to answer these "unsolved riddles" and acknowledges that the Catholic Church is willing to accept aspects within other religions in so much as they point to Christ.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.²²

²⁰ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 31. While *Nostra Aetate* was the smallest of the 16 documents which the Second Vatican Council produced, it was arguably the most ground-breaking. The document was commissioned by the German Cardinal Augustin Bea to prepare under the leadership of Pope Paul VI. While *Nostra Aetate* summarizes the Church's stance on all major religions, the document concentrates a lengthier section (section 4) on its relationship with the Jewish people. Vatican II also resulted in a new openness to other non-Catholic Christians (see the *Decree on Ecumenism*), as well as to adherents of other World religions (See *Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*), and to those others with no explicit faith at all (See *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*). For a recent account of the origins and passage of *Nostra Aetate* Jews see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews 1933-1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). Also John M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986).

²¹ *Nostra Aetate*, § 1.

²² *Nostra Aetate*, § 2. The document continues, "The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men."

The third part of *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the Catholic Church's esteem for Muslims and highlights points of continuity between Christianity and Islam. For example, both religions worship one God, who is seen as the creator of heaven and earth. Both share a deep respect for Abraham, honor Mary, and revere Jesus, although in different ways. In addition, both live in expectation of the Day of Judgment and both value a moral life and seek to worship God through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.²³

Nostra Aetate speaks volumes on the Catholic Church's shift in perspective regarding non-Catholic faith communities and non-Christian religions. While the document would have significant implications for Catholicism's relationship with a number of the world's faith communities, section four of the document moves specifically to speak of the common heritage which Christians and Jews share and will be the focus of our attention here.

a. The Pre-Vatican II Landscape

The turnaround sparked by *Nostra Aetate*, (in tandem with significant Protestant documents that will be explored in the next section) becomes strikingly clear if we compare pre-Vatican II conceptions of Jews and Judaism with those that began to emerge afterward. By contrasting what was being said *then* with what is being said *now*, it is easy to perceive how *Nostra Aetate* began to transform Christianity's posture toward the Jewish people. The dominant Christian narrative that permeated the pre-Vatican II landscape was that the Jews as a people stood accursed for missing the time of their visitation. By not recognizing the Messiah, the Jews of Jesus' time, as well succeeding generations, were sentenced to perpetual exile and degradation. Furthermore, as a result of their obdurateness, they had been stripped of the promises of election and the privileges of the covenant; Judaism had been superseded and all its blessings had now been bestowed to Christians. John T. Pawlikowski describes the bleak state of Jewish-Christian relations before *Nostra Aetate* saying,

²³ *Nostra Aetate*, § 3.

For centuries Christian theology, beginning with most of the major Church Fathers in the second century and thereafter, was infected with a viewpoint which saw the Church as replacing ‘old’ Israel in the covenantal relationship with God. This replacement theology relegated Jews to a miserable and marginal status which could only be overcome through conversion.²⁴

This triumphalist outlook cultivated a cultural and theological ethos of despising the Jews, which Jules Isaac famously coined the “teaching of contempt.”²⁵ Isaac’s contribution was to “radically awaken the Christian conscience”²⁶ by bringing to light three “demonstrably false pillars”²⁷ that undergird the theology of supersessionism.²⁸ These pillars are: that the dispersion of the Jews was Divine

²⁴ John T. Pawlikowski, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission: Forty Years after *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Moyaert and Pollefeyt eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 58. For more on the history of antisemitism within Christian history see Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); Marvin Perry and Frederick Schweitzer, eds., *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate—From Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and John Pawlikowski, *Sinai and Calvary: A Meeting of Two Peoples* (Beverly Hills: Benzinger, 1976).

²⁵ See Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Antisemitism*, Helen Weaver trans. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). French Jewish historian Jules Isaac was a Holocaust survivor who devoted his life to combating the deep-seated “teaching of contempt” within Christianity. In October of 1960, at the age of 81, Isaac met with Pope John XXIII to discuss his proposals and shortly thereafter, the Vatican set up a commission to study the Church’s relationship with the Jews. Because of Isaac’s influence, Pope John requested that a document on the Jews be part of the work of the Second Vatican Council. See Augustine Bea, *The Church and the Jewish People* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 22. For more about the origins and formation of *Nostra Aetate* including Isaac’s role see Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust 1930-1965* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 204-208; and Thomas Stransky, “The Genesis of *Nostra Aetate*,” *America* 193:12 (2005), 8-12.

²⁶ Jack Bemporad and Michael Shevack, eds., *Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996) 15-16.

²⁷ See *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 11.

²⁸ “Supersessionism” which comes from the Latin *super* (on or upon) and *sedere* (to sit) is the belief that the church now sits on the seat formerly occupied by Jews, replacing them as the new people of God. Also called, “Replacement Theology,” this position holds that the covenant God made with the Jewish people has been abrogated and thus, God is essentially finished with the Jewish people (although they are still ascribed a functional status of serving as a “witness people”). Resultantly, Judaism as a religion was rendered to be both obsolescent and superfluous. For more see R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413-414. Mary Boys identifies eight tenets of supersessionism: (1) the revelation in Jesus Christ supersedes the revelation to Israel; (2) the New Testament fulfills the Old; (3) the church replaces the Jews as God’s people; (4) Judaism is obsolete, its covenant has been abrogated; (5) post-exilic Judaism was legalistic; (6) the Jews ignored the warnings of the prophets; (7) the Jews misunderstood the Messianic prophecies about Jesus; and (8) the Jews were Christ killers. See “A More Faithful Portrait of Judaism: An Imperative for Christian Education,” in *Within Context: Essays on Jews and Judaism in the New Testament*, David P. Efroymson, Eugene J. Fisher, et al. eds. (Michael Glazier, 1993) 5.

comeuppance for the crucifixion of Jesus, that Judaism at the time of Jesus was degenerate and contains virtually nothing of value, and that the Jewish people *en masse* are guilty in perpetuity of the crime of deicide.²⁹ Isaac's study did much to elucidate how entrenched and intertwined *adversus Judaeos* thinking was within traditional Christian doctrine and teaching. Cardinal Edward Cassidy describes the baleful implications of the teaching of contempt:

There can be no denial of the fact that from the time of the Emperor Constantine on, Jews were isolated and discriminated against in the Christian world. There were expulsions and forced conversions. Literature propagated stereotypes, preaching accused the Jews of every age of deicide; the ghetto which came into being in 1555 with a papal bull became in Nazi Germany the antechamber of the extermination.³⁰

The Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah led to the accusation of deicide, a crime for which there was no absolution. The early Christians and patristic writers were able to find confirmation of these supersessionist interpretations in a number of significant historical events such as the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., which offered a kind of historical proof text to bolster the claim that the Jews stood under God's judgment and wrath because they had rejected Jesus. Every subsequent historical catastrophe which the Jewish people underwent was seen as condign because of their complicity in the death of Christ, and only reinforced the triumphalism of the Church over and against the Synagogue. Thus, the Jewish

²⁹ Deicide refers to the accusation that because the Jews had killed Christ: they had effectively killed God—a sin which merited collective, transhistoric guilt. Indicative of this view is Origen, who in *Contra Celsum*, wrote “For [the Jews] committed the most impious crime of all, when they conspired against the Savior of mankind, in the city where they performed to God the customary rites which were symbols of profound mysteries. Therefore that city where Jesus suffered these indignities had to be utterly destroyed. The Jewish nation had to be overthrown, and God's invitation to blessedness transferred to others, I mean the Christians, to whom came the teaching about the simple and pure worship of God.” IV, 22. Donald J. Dietrich illustrates how pre-Vatican II, this attitude permeated even the highest echelons of the Church by describing an encounter Theodor Herzl had with Pope Pius X in 1904. After delineating the objectives of the new Zionist movement, Herzl received this reaction from the Pontiff: “The Jews have not recognized our Lord; therefore, we cannot recognize the Jewish people. It is not pleasant to see the Turks in possession of our Holy Places, but we have to put up with it; but we could not possibly support the Jews in the acquisition of the Holy Places. If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize you” (quoted in *God and Humanity in Auschwitz: Jewish-Christian Relations and Sanctioned Murder* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 64.

³⁰ Cardinal Edward Cassidy, “Reflections on the Vatican Statement on the Shoah,” *Origins* 28/2 (May 28, 1998), 31.

people were cast into this static role in the Christian story of redemption throughout the history of the Christian church.

Concomitant with the notion of Jews as Christ-killers was the pernicious view that the Jews had been rejected by God, the “old” covenant had been abrogated and in its place, a “new” covenant was formed for the Church, the purported “New Israel.” Thus, Christians were the new people of God and had both *displaced* and *replaced* the Jews. Judaism was seen as petrified and lifeless, manipulated by a corrupt priesthood and fixated on the intricacies of a legalistic soteriological system which was actually an impediment, rather than an aide to salvation. This master story of Christian supersessionism is displayed in the traditional interpretation of the Parable of the Wicket Tenants in the Gospel of Matthew (21:33-46), which culminates with the condemnation, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” Supersessionism evolved into the veritable centerpiece of Christian thinking about their relationship with the Jews. Henceforth, the Church’s identity would be inextricably bound up in defining itself over and against the Jewish “Other.”

Another important aspect for appreciating the context from which *Nostra Aetate* emerged lies in tracing an emerging awareness of the Holocaust within Christian self-understanding. While lamentably *Nostra Aetate* made no explicit mention of the Holocaust as its reference point, it was drafted at a time when the atrocities of the Holocaust and the credibility crisis that the Church now faced had just begun to penetrate the Christian conscience. The churches began to wrestle with disconcerting questions: how could this have happened in the very heart of Christian Europe? Why had the overwhelming majority of baptized Christians seen no inherent contradiction between ecclesial teachings and National Socialism? How could Christians have been not only bystanders but active participants in genocide? While *Nostra Aetate* would remain largely silent on these questions, subsequent ecclesial documents would reflect a gradual realization that the Holocaust deeply imperiled the integrity of the Christian faith.

b. The Significance of *Nostra Aetate*³¹

It was from this context of hatred, persecutions, and defamation against the Jews that *Nostra Aetate* set the Church on a course toward a turnabout that would continue to bear much fruit in ensuing ecclesial documents. While *Nostra Aetate* is rich in biblical references, one searches in vain for any reference to the Church Fathers or decrees of early Church councils. There is no conciliar precedent for *Nostra Aetate*'s statements on the Jews—the Church was embarking into a new frontier within Jewish-Catholic dialogue. This redirection can be seen in four significant ways within *Nostra Aetate*.

First, the document is especially concerned with strengthening the Church's spiritual connection to the Jewish people and implies that the troubled relations between Christians and Jews can be at least partially attributed to focusing on what separates us from Jews instead of "the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock." An amelioration of the Church's distressed relationship with Judaism must begin with a robust emphasis on commonalities: our shared humanity, our belief in one God, our common origins with the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, our common traditions and scriptures, and our desire for a world characterized by justice and peace. *Nostra Aetate* declares the Church cannot,

Forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them both one in Himself.

Particularly noteworthy here are the words, "draws sustenance" which are deliberately issued in the present tense to affirm that the Church continues to be nourished by the living faith of the Jewish people. The implication is that the Church needs the Jews (their roots) in order to survive. This notion that Christians and Jews

³¹ All following quotations in this section are from section 4 of The Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*, October 28, 1965. U.S. Catholic Conference office of Publishing and Promotion Services (found at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html), unless otherwise stated.

share common roots would be the leitmotif throughout subsequent Catholic theological writings.

A second key change which came about because of *Nostra Aetate* flows directly from this accent on a common spiritual heritage:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

Here we see a fresh emphasis within biblical and theological studies on the Jewishness of Jesus,³² an appreciation of Jewish conceptualizations of Messiah, new perspectives on the role of the Pharisees, and on differing approaches to the covenant (to name only a few examples). With this profound hermeneutical shift in biblical studies, Christians became gradually cognizant that throughout the centuries of their history, the Jewish heritage of Jesus had been eclipsed. Knowledge of Judaism was understood now as critical for an accurate conception of Jesus and the early Christian church.

The third, and perhaps the most radical reversal of the traditional Christian narrative, lies in *Nostra Aetate*'s statement on Jews and their culpability for the death of Christ. While acknowledging the historical involvement of "some" Jewish authorities of the time, *Nostra Aetate* declares that the death of Christ "cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today." Thus, the widely propagated canard that the Jews collectively are eternally culpable for the crime of killing Christ is discredited. The document goes on to spell out the implication of this declaration saying "The Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from Sacred Scripture."

Fourth and finally, *Nostra Aetate* "decries the hatred, persecutions, and display of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any

³² For works on Jesus and Judaism see: E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Benard J. Lee, *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) and Michael Hilton and Gordian Marshall, *The Gospels and Rabbinic Judaism: A Study Guide* (New York: KTAV and ADL, 1988).

source.”³³ This brief phrase is the only time antisemitism is mentioned in the document, and although concrete implications for excising antisemitism from Christian doctrine and practice would not be spelled out for some time, it was the first clear admonition that antipathy toward Jews is no longer compatible with Catholic theology and praxis.

For the first time in nearly two millennia, the Church’s endorsement of antisemitism showed hopeful signs of being reversed. *Nostra Aetate* promulgated an authoritative declaration that speaks positively of Judaism and the Jewish people and exposed the possibility of an improved relationship between Jews and Catholics. Cardinal Willerbrands, the first President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, emphasizes the unprecedented nature of *Nostra Aetate* calling it “an absolute unicum...never before had a systematic, positive, comprehensive, careful and daring presentation of the Jews and Judaism been made in the Church by a Pope or a Council.”³⁴ From the very beginning of the document, *Nostra Aetate* creates a “theological about-face on the Jews.”³⁵ Similar encomiums are given by theologian Gregory Baum who argued that “the Church’s recognition of the spiritual status of the Jewish religion is the most dramatic example of doctrinal turn-about in the ago-old magisterium ordinarium” to take place at Vatican II.³⁶

The document was certainly not without vexing ambiguities and weaknesses: it reiterated many of the traditional stereotypes and conceptions of Jews and Judaism; it did not acknowledge the Christian history of fostering antisemitism; neither the Holocaust nor the creation of the State of Israel were even mentioned; nor was the need for Christians to embark upon a long process of repentance for their sins against the Jewish people. Nevertheless, as Michael McGarry reminds us, *Nostra Aetate* did

³³ *Nostra Aetate*, §4. It should be noted that many were deeply disappointed by the Council’s use of the word “decries” (alternatively translated as “deplores”) rather than the much stronger word “condemns.” However, Pope John XXIII explicitly requested the choice of words so that the Second Vatican Council would eschew the ancient practice of Conciliar councils anathematizing people. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: The American Press, 1966), 666 n. 27.

³⁴ Eugene Fischer, “The Evolution of a Tradition: From *Nostra Aetate* to the *Notes*,” in *Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, 1970-1985* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 241.

³⁵ John Pawlikowski, “Reflections on Covenant and Mission: Forty Years After *Nostra Aetate*,” *Cross Currents* 56 (2007): 72.

³⁶ Gregory Baum, “The Social Context of American Catholic Theology,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986), 87.

provide “more of a directional trajectory than a fully worked out content of the church’s contemporary relation with Judaism and the Jewish people.”³⁷ As the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration draws nigh, we are still, as Cardinal Walter Kasper reminds us only at “the beginning of the beginning”³⁸ of a long and arduous process of reform. Kasper continues, “*Nostra Aetate* opened a new chapter in the predominantly dark history of the relationship between Jews and Christians. It represents a new beginning which has in the meantime found broad resonance in many declarations and official statements at Bishops’ Conferences, Synods and Ecclesial Commissions.”³⁹ While *Nostra Aetate* began to open the door to reformation of the Jewish-Christian relationship, the next two documents would push that door a bit further ajar.

2. GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CONCILIAR DECLARATION OF *NOSTRA AETATE* (1974)

After the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, Pope Paul VI established the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (CRRJ) in 1974. The CRRJ issued two subsequent statements, which would be positive steps in practically implementing and expanding upon the intentions of *Nostra Aetate*; the first is the 1974 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration of Nostra Aetate* (hereafter, *Guidelines*).

The conceived objective of *Guidelines* was to be primarily pragmatic; to reiterate the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* and to contribute practical, concrete suggestions for its implementation. The introductory note states its purpose as “to give ideas to those who were asking themselves how to start on a local level that

³⁷ See Michael McGarry, “Nostra Aetate: The Church’s Bond to the Jewish People: Context, Content, Promise,” in *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 389.

³⁸ Cardinal Walter Kasper, “The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavor of the Catholic Church,” address delivered at Boston College on November 6, 2002.

³⁹ Kasper, Walter. “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue” (Address delivered at the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, December 6, 2004).

dialogue which the text invites them to begin and to develop.”⁴⁰ The concrete suggestions are organized around four central themes: (1) dialogue, (2) liturgy, (3) teaching and education and (4) joint social action, which are summarized in the following.

a. Dialogue⁴¹

A forthright admission is made that conversations between Christians and Jews in the past have rarely resulted in anything other than monologue. The notion of “real dialogue” is proposed in hopes of fostering “a better mutual knowledge” and of “probing the riches of one’s own tradition.” It is imperative that Christians acquire a better knowledge of the religious tradition of Judaism through dialogue, described as presupposing that,

Each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one’s own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions.⁴²

Following this presupposition, there is a rather paradoxical statement that “In virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world.” While qualifying that the Church’s witness must be done with great respect for religious liberty, nothing is said about how this might be envisioned, nor how these missionary endeavors are consistent with the desideratum of “real dialogue.”

⁴⁰ The preamble of *Guidelines* is particularly noteworthy in that antisemitism is not simply *decried* (as in *Nostra Aetate*) but is condemned “as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity.” See Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate”* (n. 4), December 1, 1974, § Introductory Note (found at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19741201_nostra-aetate_en.html).

⁴¹ The following quotations are from §I of *Guidelines*, unless otherwise stated.

⁴² While the document does admit that when it comes to dialogue, Jews have a tendency toward suspicion, which is “inspired by an unfortunate past” it concludes the dialogue section on a positive note. “In whatever circumstances as shall prove possible and mutually acceptable, one might encourage a common meeting in the presence of God, in prayer and silent meditation, a highly efficacious way of finding that humility, that openness of heart and mind, necessary prerequisites for a deep knowledge of oneself and of others. In particular, that will be done in connection with great causes such as the struggle for peace and justice.”

b. Liturgy⁴³

This section seeks to underscore the “existing links” between Christian and Jewish liturgies such as their commitment to being a living community in the service of God and mankind. The Bible is of paramount importance when speaking of commonalities, thus Christians should strive for a better understanding of the “Old” Testament,⁴⁴ particularly “whatever in the Old Testament retains its own perpetual value.” The hermeneutical approach to scripture is described as one in which the New Testament elicits the full meaning of the “Old”, and both the “Old” and the New Testaments illumine and explain each other. Yet, Christians are strongly admonished not to set the “Old” Testament against the New, and care must be taken to ensure that liturgical phrases and passages are not misunderstood or distorted “to show the Jewish people as such in an unfavorable light.”

c. Teaching and Education⁴⁵

This section reiterates seven developments in the Catholic understanding of the Jewish faith which repeal the long-held teaching of contempt. (1) It is the same God who speaks both in the old and new Covenants. (2) Judaism in the time of Jesus and the apostles was multifaceted, with manifold strands, complexities and values. (3) The “Old” Testament and the Jewish tradition must not be characterized as laden with fear and legalism, with no consideration to the love of God and humankind. (4) Jesus and his first followers were born of the Jewish people, and saw themselves in deep continuity with the Law and covenant. (5) Jesus’ trial and passion cannot be collectively blamed upon the Jews living then, nor upon the Jews living today. (6) The Jewish religion and its history did not cease with the fall of Jerusalem but continued to develop a tradition rich in religious value. (7) Christians, like the prophets before them, await the final day when all people will serve the Lord with one accord.

⁴³ The following quotations are from § II of *Guidelines*, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁴ I place the term “old” in quotations when in reference to the Old Testament as a reminder that “old” by no means should imply that the Old Testament is archaic or irrelevant. Following scholars such as Marva Dawn and John Goldingay, I much prefer the term “First Testament” in order to emphasize the book’s significance and free it from inherent connotations of irrelevancy and a supersessionist second-class status. However, the traditional language is kept here for the purpose of reflection on the conciliar teachings. The problematic assumption that in the “Old” Testament, Jews and Christians are essentially reading the same scriptures will be further explored in chapter three.

⁴⁵ The following quotations are from § III of *Guidelines*, unless otherwise stated.

The sixth point on this list, which is easily overlooked, is particularly groundbreaking. Here we see for the first time in a pronouncement at the highest level of the Catholic Church that Judaism remains a life-giving religion, one that is “rich in religious values.” *Nostra Aetate* spoke of the Jews as a people whom God finds “most dear” but this is said to be “for the sake of their Fathers,” meaning on account of the merits of the Christian patriarchs. In stark contrast, here is the prospect that Judaism is a viable religious movement in its own right, instead of merely valuable as a precursor to Christianity. Donald J. Dietrich underscores the significance of this statement, saying that it “repudiated the familiar presumptive fossilization of Judaism by insisting that Jewish history had not ended with the destruction of Jerusalem.”⁴⁶

d. Joint Social Action⁴⁷

The final section of *Guidelines* emphasizes that both the Christian and Jewish tradition place value on the human person as made in the image of God. Love of God must produce “effective action for the good of mankind” and thus Jews and Christians are exhorted to work together to seek justice and peace in the world.

While *Guidelines* makes constructive steps at deepening the tentative strides of *Nostra Aetate*, perhaps its most significant contribution is found in the preamble. It says the “spiritual bonds and historical links” which bind the Church to Judaism,

Render obligatory a better mutual understanding and renewed mutual esteem. On the practical level in particular, Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.⁴⁸

Coupled with the subsequent assertion in section III of *Guidelines*, that Judaism continues to be a living faith, rich in religious values, this is an exceedingly important development within ecclesial statements. The argument is that *because* Christianity is organically connected to Judaism, it is incumbent upon Christians to

⁴⁶ Donald J. Dietrich, *God and Humanity in Auschwitz: Jewish-Christian Relations and Sanctioned Murder* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 74.

⁴⁷ The following quotations are from § IV of *Guidelines*, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁸ *Guidelines*, § Preamble.

gain an accurate awareness of Jewish self-conceptions and religious categories—without which they will have a skewed understanding of their own Christian faith.

Nine years after *Nostra Aetate*, *Guidelines* make several significant contributions for Jewish-Christian relations. While still not directly mentioning the Holocaust or Christian complicity therein, the document's preamble says the Council is "deeply affected by the memory of the persecution and massacre of Jews, which took place in Europe just before and during the Second World War."⁴⁹ *Guidelines* soundly condemned antisemitism as antithetical to Christianity; it acknowledged that God speaks in both the "Old" Testament and the New Testament; it further repudiated the misconception that Judaism is characterized by justice, fear and legalism, contrasted with Christianity as a religion of love toward God and the neighbor; it recognized that Judaism is a legitimate and enduring religious tradition and encouraged Christians to learn about both the Judaism of biblical times, as well as the way in which contemporary Jews define themselves. The next step would be to spell out how these changes should be implemented within Christian preaching and teaching.

3. *NOTES ON THE CORRECT WAY TO PRESENT THE JEWS AND JUDAISM IN THE PREACHING
AND CATECHESIS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*
(1985)

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the CRRJ promulgated *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (hereafter, *Notes*) on June 24, 1985. The document's objective is to establish the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* and *Guidelines* as an important part of Catholic praxis and to make clear that there is an appropriate way to present the Jewish faith in catechesis and preaching. It sought to remedy "a painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians."⁵⁰ *Notes* is divided into six subheadings, summarized in the following.

⁴⁹ *Guidelines*, § Preamble.

⁵⁰ *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church*, June 24, 1985, § Conclusion (found at

a. Religious Teaching and Judaism

This section soundly re-emphasized the deep, “spiritual bonds linking” Jews and Christians and the “great spiritual patrimony” they both share because of their biblical heritage.⁵¹ “Because of the unique relations that exist between Christianity and Judaism”⁵² the document says, they are “linked together at the very level of their identity.”⁵³ Among the many points made in this section is that missions to all people is still a central task of the Church. *Notes* reemphasizes the words of *Guidelines* that “In virtue of her divine mission, the Church which is to be the all-embracing means of salvation... must of her nature proclaim Jesus Christ to the world.” Although the practical implications of this claim are still largely unexplored, this section of *Notes* does make it clear that the Church is “the fullness of the means of salvation” and thus the “Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation.”⁵⁴

The document also stresses the importance of objective and rigorously accurate education on Judaism, not only to counter antisemitism but also to kindle within Christians “an exact knowledge of the wholly unique ‘bond’ which joins us as a Church to the Jews and to Judaism.”⁵⁵ It continues by explicating the purpose of understanding this unique bond saying, “In this way, they would learn to appreciate and love the latter.”⁵⁶

b. Relations between the Old and New Testament

This section of *Notes* delineates eleven principles for addressing the relationship between the two testaments. Among the more salient points are the continuity between the “Old” and the New (contra Marcionism) and that while Christians read

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html). While still not using the term “Holocaust,” *Notes* does say that catechesis should help Christians in “understanding the meaning for the Jews of the extermination during the years 1939-1945, and its consequences” (§ VI.1).

⁵¹ *Notes*, § I.1.

⁵² *Notes*, § I.1.

⁵³ *Notes*, § I.2.

⁵⁴ *Notes*, § I.7.

⁵⁵ *Notes*, § I.8.

⁵⁶ It is interesting that while advocating an objective and rigorous teaching on Judaism, the document proceeds to delineate the exact role that Jews play in the Christian story: to wit, they “have been chosen by God to prepare the coming of Christ and have preserved everything that was progressively revealed and given in the course of that preparation, notwithstanding their difficulty in recognizing in Him their Messiah.” *Notes*, § I.8. This pattern will be further explored in chapter III.

the “Old” Testament in light of the Christ event, the Jewish reading also has value to Christians and thus Christians should seek to learn about the Jewish perspective on scripture in order to enhance their own. The section concludes saying that Jews and Christians both await the coming of God’s kingdom as promised in Scripture, and they should work together for its advent.

c. Jewish Roots of Christianity

This section emphasizes even more powerfully the Jewish foundation upon which the Church was built. Some of the nine points made in this section are that Jesus was truly a first century Jew who was observant to the Law of Moses, Jesus (and Paul) shared some commonalities with the Pharisees such as their teaching method, their belief in the resurrection, almsgiving and prayer, etc. This portion of *Notes* underscores the fact “The Church and Christianity, for all their novelty, find their origin in the Jewish milieu of the first century of our era.”⁵⁷

d. Jews in the New Testament

Section four explains that the polemical language “The Jews,” which is often used to connote the enemies of Jesus, may be simply the result of subsequent internal struggles between the early Church and existing Jewish communities. While admittedly there were clashes between Jesus and some of the Jews of his day, it is wrong to attribute blame to subsequent generations of Jews because of the behavior of those during the time of Jesus. It concludes by reiterating the words of *Nostra Aetate* that “The Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures even though it is true that ‘the Church is the new people of God.’”⁵⁸

e. The Liturgy

The fifth section briefly accentuates another common ground between Jews and Christians—their liturgical heritage. Though on the surface Jews and Christians worship in very different ways, there are many similarities and parallels to be found, such as in the prayers of praise and intercession for the living and the dead,

⁵⁷ *Notes*, § III.9.

⁵⁸ *Notes*, § IV.2.

eucharistic prayers, religious holidays, etc. It concludes, “The faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church. Such is the case of liturgy.”⁵⁹

f. Judaism and Christianity in History

Section six highlights historical links between Christianity and Judaism. It re-emphasizes the notable contention of *Guidelines*, that Jewish history does not end in 70 CE but maintains its vitality throughout Jewish history. In the same section, the long history of Israel is designated as “a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design. We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people *punished*, preserved as a *living argument* for Christian apologetic.”⁶⁰

4. *WE REMEMBER: A REFLECTION ON THE SHOAH*

(1998)

On March 12, 1998 the Vatican issued the much anticipated statement *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. Almost 33 years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, *We Remember* was the first Vatican document to explicitly mention the Holocaust and to begin to wrestle (however superficially) with questions of Christian complicity. The document is addressed firstly to “brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church” and also to “our Jewish friends...to hear us with open hearts.”⁶¹ In his opening letter to the statement, Pope John Paul II calls the Shoah⁶² “an indelible stain on the history of the century.” He expresses hope that *We Remember*

⁵⁹ *Notes*, § V.1.

⁶⁰ *Notes*, § VI.1. The witness people typology here in this final sentence evinces one of the more problematic aspects of *Notes*. It should also be mentioned that this section contains the first official Vatican mention of the existence of the State of Israel, but makes no positive statement about its theological significance.

⁶¹ *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. March 12, 1998, §I. See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_16031998_shoah_en.html for the full text.

⁶² In the 2001 document, *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah*, this explanation is given for why the term Shoah is utilized rather than Holocaust: “The Holy See wisely uses the Hebrew word *Shoah* to describe the Holocaust. While not diminishing the suffering of Nazism’s many other victims, such as the Romani (Gypsies) and Poles, this term preserves a central focus on Nazism’s central victim group, God’s People, the Jews.” See *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See’s We Remember*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB Publishing, 2001), 16-17 n.1.

“would heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices;” and that it might foster remembrance so the horrors of the Holocaust will never again be possible. Christians are called to “place themselves humbly before the Lord and examine themselves on the responsibility which they too have for the evils of our time.”⁶³

a. Section One⁶⁴

The first main section of *We Remember* highlights the duty to remember the Shoah, an “unspeakable tragedy” which must never be forgotten. The Shoah is described as

The attempt by the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people, with the consequent killing of millions of Jews. Women and men, old and young, children and infants, for the sole reason of their Jewish origin, were persecuted and deported. Some were killed immediately, while others were degraded, illtreated, tortured and utterly robbed of their human dignity, and then murdered... This was the *Shoah*. It is a major fact of the history of this century, a fact which still concerns us today.

We Remember insists that the responsibility to remember is particularly binding upon the Church, because of “her very close bonds of spiritual kinship with the Jewish people.” It contends that the Church’s relationship with the Jews is unlike that of any other religion.

b. Section Two⁶⁵

The second section, entitled “What We Must Remember,” makes three brief points. First, the suffering and persecution that the Jews in this century endured, for no reason other than that they were Jews, is “beyond the capacity of words to convey.”

⁶³ *We Remember*, § Letter of Pope John Paul II. It is noteworthy that this is the only place the word “responsibility” is found in the document, a fact which many have pointed out as a glaring and disappointing omission. See for example Kevin Madigan, “Has the Papacy ‘Owned’ Vatican Guilt for the Church’s Role in the Holocaust?” in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4, Plenary address given at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, (Boca Raton, FL, 2009). Here Madigan compares shortcomings in *We Remember* with the more robust 1997 statement by France’s Roman Catholic clergy at Drancy, France. Also see chapter 16 “Catholic Views on the Holocaust and Genocide: A Critical Appraisal” by Steven L. Jacobs in *Confronting Genocide: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); and the response to the Vatican Document “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations available at http://www.jcrelations.net/Response_to_Vatican_Document__We_Remember__A_Reflection_on_the_Shoah.2397.0.html.

⁶⁴ The following quotations are from § I of *We Remember* unless otherwise stated.

⁶⁵ The following quotations are from § II of *We Remember* unless otherwise stated.

The Jews' faithfulness to the God of Israel and the Torah is described as a "unique witness." Second, because of the immensity of Nazi crimes, mere historical methods of research will not suffice; moral and religious memory is required. Christians are obliged to reflect soberly on what gave rise to these atrocities. Third, because these horrors took place in "countries of long-standing Christian civilization" it is imperative to investigate the relationship between Nazi persecution and Christian attitudes towards Jews throughout the ages.

c. Section Three⁶⁶

Section three examines the history of "Relations Between Jews and Christians," which is, admittedly "tormented." The statement attributes this tumultuous past to "erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people," which have long circulated within the ranks of Christendom and generated "feelings of hostility" towards the Jewish people. *We Remember* emphasizes that such negative interpretations of the New Testament have heretofore been utterly repudiated by the Second Vatican Council. The document traces the development of the anti-Judaism that burgeoned within the Christian world and laments that in spite of Christian preaching of love for all, even for one's enemies, minorities and those who were different in any way have often been "penalized."

We Remember recounts that beginning in the nineteenth century, a new kind of anti-Judaism germinated in European soil, which was more sociological and political than religious; this largely non-religious animus toward Jews, coupled with an "extremist form of nationalism," would be the "pseudo-scientific basis," upon which National Socialism would erect its Jew-hatred.

In response to this burgeoning animosity toward Jews, *We Remember* declares that the Church in Germany responded by condemning racism, evidenced by a list of purported luminaries in the Catholic Church, such as Cardinal Bertram of Breslau, Cardinal Faulhaber and Bernhard Lichtenberg. A case is made that Pope Pius XI condemned Nazi racism in his Encyclical Letter, *Mit brennender Sorge*, and in his Belgian address of 1938 saying, "Anti-Semitism is unacceptable. Spiritually, we are all Semites." Likewise, it is purported that Pope Pius XII, in his 1939

⁶⁶ The following quotations are from § III of *We Remember* unless otherwise stated.

encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, “warned against theories which denied the unity of the human race and against the deification of the State, all of which he saw as leading to a real ‘hour of darkness.’”⁶⁷

d. Section Four⁶⁸

Section four, “Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Shoah,” makes another concerted effort to sharply distinguish between Christian anti-Judaism, which is grounded in “long-standing sentiments of mistrust and hostility” and modern, racially based antisemitism, which flourished in the 19th century and is “based on theories contrary to the constant teaching of the Church on the unity of the human race and on the equal dignity of all races and peoples.” *We Remember* maintains it is only the former (more mild) variety of anti-Judaism that Christians have been guilty of “at times.” Thus the document avers that the Holocaust was manufactured by “a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, it did not hesitate to oppose the Church and persecute her members also.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ This heroic portrayal of Catholic leadership, particularly Pope Pius XII has been one of the most fiercely contested aspects of *We Remember*.

⁶⁸ The following quotations are from § IV of *We Remember* unless otherwise stated.

⁶⁹ This claim evoked some of the most incendiary reactions from both Christian and Jewish sources. In extricating traditional Christian anti-Judaism from modern, racial antisemitism, *We Remember* seems to deny any sort of causal relationship between centuries of anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism. The assertion that the Nazis were a thoroughly pagan regime fails to apprehend that they drew heavily upon Christian symbols and rhetoric in order to strengthen antipathy toward the Jewish people (e.g. the early Church fathers rabid vilification of the Jews, copious volumes of medieval *adversus Judaeos* literature, and prolifically promulgated images which portrayed the Jew as Satan, the anti-Christ, Judas etc.) This criticism is echoed by Kevin Madigan, “Virtually all Jewish commentators faulted the document for failing to acknowledge the deep connection between ecclesiastically sponsored anti-Judaism and the anti-Semitism that achieved such disastrous expression in the Shoah.” “Has the Papacy ‘Owned’ Vatican Guilt for the Church’s Role in the Holocaust?” in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4, 11. Victoria Barnett writes, “The postwar attempts of some German church leaders to differentiate between ‘Christian’ anti-Semitism and Nazi ‘racial’ anti-Semitism obscured the fact that, whatever their historical differences, these two streams had emptied, finally, into the same murderous river.” *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 290. Several studies have been written in response to this spurious claim including James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) and David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001). The paper *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See’s We Remember* (USCCB, 2001) clarifies the connection between anti-Judaism and antisemitism this way: “Christian anti-Judaism alone cannot account for the Holocaust. Semi-scientific racial theories and specific historical, ideological, economic and social realities within Germany must also be taken into account in order to begin grappling with why Nazism

After the Catholic Church's ideology about the Jews is carefully severed from Nazi ideology, *We Remember* ponders if the crimes of the Holocaust were "not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts." Could these anti-Jewish notions possibly have desensitized Christians to Nazi persecutions of the Jews? The reply given is, essentially, that we will never know. *We Remember* states that it would be impossible to discern any patterns of attitudes or behavior within the church, since people's motivations and attitudes are subject to a number of complex influences. At best, this difficult question may only be answered on a case-by-case basis.⁷⁰

One possible motive suggested for the behavior of Christians during the Holocaust was that "many people were altogether unaware of the 'final solution'." Another is that perhaps they were fearful for themselves and their families. Some chose to take advantage of the situation and "still others were moved by envy." A similar question is posed two paragraphs later in *We Remember*: "Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted, and in particular to the persecuted Jews?" The reply given is simply that many did, but others did not.⁷¹

Moving the discussion from the individual to the corporate level, *We Remember* chastens the governments of some Western, predominantly Christian countries which hesitated to open their borders to persecuted Jews. It acknowledges that the Church deeply regrets "the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the church."⁷² It states,

succeeded in mobilizing virtually the entire intellectual and technological apparatus of a modern industrial state to its warped purpose of eliminating from human history God's People, the Jews" (10-11).

⁷⁰ By saying this must be understood only on a case-by-case basis, *We Remember* quite problematically eliminates any ability to discern or critically analyze patterns of conduct or predominant attitudes which were extant in the institutional church during the *Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*.

⁷¹ The document also fails to mention those members of the Catholic Church who actively took part in the persecution and extermination of the Jewish people, nor incriminating activities on the part of Catholic institutions. For example, in allowing access to their baptismal records, Catholic (and Protestant) churches helped to facilitate the Final Solution by granting Nazi's access to *Ariernachweis*, that is proof of "Aryan" descent. Nor does *We Remember*'s terse statement on rescuers grapple with the fact that those few brave individuals who did assist persecuted Jews had to do so, for the most part, completely on their own without any kind of institutional support.

⁷² While the document expresses contrition for the "failures" of its members, these failures, their scope and nature, are left amorphous and largely unexplored in the document *We Remember*. Numerous criticisms have also stemmed from the Church's admission that "some" of its members erred, which seems to exculpate the higher echelons of ecclesial leadership and evade altogether, questions of corporate culpability. Hanspeter Heinz reflects upon the way in which the leadership of

The spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not that which might have been expected from Christ's followers. We cannot know how many Christians in countries occupied or ruled by the Nazi powers or their allies were horrified at the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest. For Christians, this heavy burden of conscience of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence.⁷³

e. Section Five⁷⁴

We Remember's last section "Looking Together to a Common Future" appeals to Christians to rekindle an awareness of the Jewish roots of their faith, reminding them that Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles descended from the Jewish people. Christians are admonished once more that the Church "draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree on to which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles" and that the Jews are our beloved elder brothers. In addition to this final entreaty to remember the Jewish origins of Christianity, the document expressed the need for repentance of past failures saying,

At the end of this Millennium the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age.⁷⁵ This is an act of repentance (*teshuva*), since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children. The Church

the Catholic Church refrains from a "sincere and open admission of its historical guilt." *We Remember* refers to the guilt of "some sons and daughters of the Church," but eschews any admission of even the possibility of any kind of guilt of the Church itself. See Hanspeter Heinz's article entitled "How Can We Speak of Guilt, Suffering, and Reconciliation" for an article on the difficulties which arise when we speak of ecclesiastical "sin" with regard to the Holocaust. Found in *Humanity at the Limit: The Impact of the Holocaust Experience on Jews and Christians*, Michael A Signer, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 95-104.

⁷³ In reaction to the pope's claim that the spiritual resistance and the concrete actions of many Christians "was not that which might have been expected from Christ's followers" Gerhard Bodendorfer retorts "A close observation of history actually reveals the opposite: *because* Christian teaching, preaching, attitude and action were so anti-Judaic in the past, a wide range of the Christian population accepted National Socialism. And it is *because* of this fact that a church, which wants to remember and turn around, must be expected to speak an unambiguous word of repentance, admit its guilt, and make a commitment to turn around not only in words. See Bodendorfer "Excuse Instead of Confession of Guilt: A Statement about the Vatican Document, 'We Remember'" *Jewish-Christian Relations*, 2002, at

<http://www.jcrelations.net/Excuse+Instead+of+Confession+of+Guilt%3F.2321.0.html?L=3>.

⁷⁴ The following quotations are from § 5 of *We Remember* unless otherwise stated.

⁷⁵ Here, once more is the document's patent refusal to envision antisemitism ecclesialogically, but only in terms of individual actions and attitudes.

approaches with deep respect and great compassion the experience of extermination, the *Shoah*, suffered by the Jewish people during World War II...We pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people has suffered in our century will lead to a new relationship with the Jewish people.

The document closes with this final admonishment: “the spoiled seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any human heart.” Although *We Remember* is one of the most significant landmarks within Catholic and Jewish relations, its weaknesses and glaring omissions evince the inherent tension within Jewish-Christian dialogue and the manifold ways in which work remains to be done. Mordecai Paldiel sums up the overarching impression of *We Remember* saying it “is in certain ways an apologia for the Catholic Church, an attempt by its leaders in the Vatican to absolve the church of any responsibility for the Holocaust and for the role the church played in the persecution of the Jews during its long history.”⁷⁶

Despite its myriad of shortcomings,⁷⁷ several positive elements are visible within *We Remember*. There is a clear acknowledgment of the historical reality of the Holocaust, in contrast to previous documents that spoke with tepid and veiled terms such as massacre and persecution. A serious emphasis is placed on the Christian duty to remember—and to remember rightly. However, this duty to remember stems primarily from the close relationship which Christians and Jews share. While leaving the precise nature of Christian antisemitism amorphous and unexamined, the document soundly condemns it, as well as all forms of genocide and the racist ideologies which give rise to them. There is also an expression of remorse for

⁷⁶ Paldiel, *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans and Reconciliation* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing, 2006), 365.

⁷⁷ Franklin Littell says “The ruthless self-examination that is required for a confrontation with the murderous events of the twentieth century, of which the Holocaust was the most grievous, is missing from ‘We Remember.’ Wrong was done, it was said, but by ‘some Christians.’ ‘Christians also have been guilty’ of ‘anti-Judaism.’ It is said that Hitler and his gang were ‘pagans,’ ‘in a thoroughly neo-pagan regime’—a statement that would have been timely and courageous in response to the anti-Jewish boycott of 1 April, 1933. The ambiguous record of Pius XII, to use the kindest words of reference, is jarringly inserted and given a cosmetic treatment. Declaring itself to be ‘a statement of repentance,’ the Vatican message ‘We Remember’ is cast in fact in the third person pronoun and uttered in a passive voice.” Littell, “The Holocaust and the Christians” *Journal of Church and State*, vol 14:4 (1999): 735-736. For a more in-depth list of criticisms pertaining to *We Remember*, see *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 156-169.

Catholic complicity in the Holocaust, however inadequately that complicity is understood. In spite of the statement's ambiguous legacy, John Pawlikowski says it "establishes the Holocaust as a permanent and vital issue of Christian self-reflection."⁷⁸

Henceforth, Christians are obliged to engage in a far-reaching study of the history of Jewish-Christian relations and antisemitism as an ineluctable part of reconstructing their identity in the post-Holocaust era. Berger and Patterson add "While it may have helped to heal some wounds, the document exposed the festering nature of others. *We Remember* is simultaneously an absolute departure from, and an espousal of, mixed Church signals and missed opportunities."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the statement would elucidate critical areas within Jewish-Christian dialogue in need of further reform and would serve as a catalyst for more sustained transformation.⁸⁰

5. THE LEGACY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

While Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) began the *aggiornamento* within the Catholic Church, opening the door for a revision of the Church's posture toward the Jewish people, it was Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) who made the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism a central focus of his pontificate. A native of Poland, he personally encountered the systematic persecution of the Jews and the deep-seated antisemitism of his countrymen. John Paul II is responsible for initiating a number of symbolic gestures and practical steps to contend against the scourge of antisemitism and to improve relations between Christians and Jews, leading Jack Bemporad and Michael Shevack to opine, "No other pope has said or done more to forge a spirit of

⁷⁸ Pawlikowski, "Catholic Views on Holocaust and Genocide: A Critical Appraisal" in *Confronting Genocide*, 268.

⁷⁹ *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 15.

⁸⁰ Among the many significant Roman Catholic statements and documents which have been issued since *We Remember* include: *Catholic Bishops of Italy Letter to the Jewish Community of Italy* (1998); *Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Responds to 1998 We Remember' document* (2000); *Catholic Canadian Bishops: Jubilee: Renewing Common Bonds with the Jewish Community* (2000); *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001 PBC Vatican Study); *Statement of Iraqi Patriarchs and Bishops* (2003); *Reflections on Covenant and Mission by the Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and the Delegates of Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs* (2002); *Declaration Responsibility in Today's Pluralistic Society* by the Discussion Group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics; Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, *Closing Address at ICCJ* (2005); *Pope Benedict XVI on the Occasion of His Visit to the Synagogue of Cologne* (2005); and *Pope Benedict XVI Meets with Chief Rabbi of Rome* (2006).

love between Jews and Catholics than John Paul II.”⁸¹ The following sampling of speeches is reflective of the pope’s contribution to transforming the traditional Christian perspective on the Jewish people. In March 12, 1979, in his first papal audience with Jewish leader, the pope told representatives of the Jewish World Organizations that the Second Vatican Council

Understood that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities...it is on [this] basis...that we recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration.⁸²

This vision of two communities, connected at the very level of their identities, would remain a critical, guiding principle throughout his pontificate. In November of 1980, he made an address to the German Jewish community in Mainz where spoke of “the depth and richness of our common inheritance.”⁸³ The pope says that the “concrete brotherly relations between Jews and Catholics in Germany assume a quite particular value against the grim background of the persecution and the attempted extermination of Judaism in this country.” He calls the large-scale destruction of European Jewry “tragic proof of where discrimination and contempt of human dignity can lead.”⁸⁴ He portrayed Judaism as a *living* legacy that Christians were compelled to understand in order to grasp their own faith truly. Significantly, the Jewish community was addressed as “the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked by God”⁸⁵ and the pope emphasized once again, the

⁸¹ Jack Bemporad and Michael Shevack, *Our Age: The Historical New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 52.

⁸² Address to Representatives of Jewish Organizations, March 12, 1979.

⁸³ This and the following quotations in this paragraph are from “Address to the Jewish Community in Mainz, West Germany,” November 17, 1980, unless otherwise stated.

⁸⁴ “Especially” he continues, “if they are animated by perverse theories on a presumed difference in the value of races or on the division of men into men of “high worth,” “worthy of living,” and who are “worthless,” “unworthy of living.” Before God all men are of the same value and importance.”

⁸⁵ The pope’s “Address to Jewish Leaders in Miami used a similar phrase saying Jews are partners in a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked September 11, 1987. This and other papal statements on Jews and the Jewish people between 1979 and 1995 are available in *Spiritual Pilgrimage: John Paul II – Texts on Jews and Judaism*, Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds. (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 105-109. For more statements by Pope John Paul II and others, particularly on the concept of covenant, see this survey by Hans Hermann Henrix, The covenant has never been revoked: Basis of the Christian-Jewish relationship http://www.jcrelations.net/The_covenant_has_never_been_revoked.2250.0.html#27.

“permanent value” of the “Old” Testament, as well as the Jewish people who witness to it.⁸⁶ The Mainz speech insisted that Christians embrace the election of the Jews as a continuing and permanent reality. The pontiff often repeated the notion of an unabrogated covenant, making it the basis for transforming the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.⁸⁷

In April 11, 1986, John Paul II became the first pope in history to visit Rome’s central synagogue where he prayed together with the Roman Jewish community there. He reiterated the resolution of *Nostra Aetate*, deploring any and all forms of antisemitism. He stated, “I would like once more to express a word of abhorrence for the genocide decreed against the Jewish people during the last War, which led to the holocaust of millions of innocent victims.”⁸⁸ He spoke warmly of the familial relationship between Christianity and Judaism:

The Jewish religion is not “extrinsic” to us, but in a certain way is “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.⁸⁹

On November 8, 1990, John Paul II averred that an encounter with the Holocaust must lead to repentance. He stated, “For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of anti-Semitism and establish a new relationship with our

⁸⁶ The pope continues, “The effort must be made to understand better everything in the Old Testament that has its own, permanent value . . . since this value is not wiped out by the later interpretation of the New Testament, which, on the contrary, gave the Old Testament its full meaning, so that it is a question rather of reciprocal enlightenment and explanation.”

⁸⁷ Walter Kasper argues that the term “unabrogated covenant” is, in fact, “the starting point and foundation of a renewed theology of Judaism within both Catholic and Protestant theology.” See: “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue” (Address delivered at the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, December 6, 2004).

⁸⁸ Discourse by John Paul II to representatives of the Jewish community at the Great Synagogue, Rome, April 13, 1986.

⁸⁹ *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin: Church and Society*, Alphonse P. Spilly, ed., (Liturgical Press, 2000), 272-273.

kindred nation of the Old Covenant.”⁹⁰ On March 23rd, 2000, Pope John Paul II visited Yad Vashem confessing,

I have come to Yad Vashem to pay homage to the millions of Jewish people who, stripped of everything, especially of their human dignity, were murdered in the Holocaust...We wish to remember. But we wish to remember for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again will evil prevail, as it did for the millions of innocent victims of Nazism....In this place of solemn remembrance, I fervently pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people suffered in the 20th century will lead to a new relationship between Christians and Jews. Let us build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Jewish feeling among Christians or anti-Christian feeling among Jews, but rather the mutual respect required of those who adore the one Creator and Lord, and look to Abraham as our common father in faith.⁹¹

Two more notable and symbolic expressions of Christian repentance were made in March 2000. On March 12th, the pope began the first Lenten season of the new millennium with a litany of confession at St. Peter’s Basilica. The prayer included contrition for “sins against the people of Israel.”⁹² On March 26th at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, following the custom of inserting written prayers into the foundation of the Second Temple, John Paul II placed these words: “God of our fathers you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.”⁹³ With each of these concrete and symbolic acts, Pope John Paul was attempting to embody the theological and doctrinal revisions within Catholic theology, giving shape to the radical reformation which had taken place since *Nostra Aetate*.

⁹⁰ John Paul II, “Address to the New Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See,” November 8, 1990. Available in Fisher and Klenicki, *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 138. 33. John Paul II, “Prayer at the Western Wall,” March 26, 2000.

⁹¹ *The Visit of Pope John Paul II to Yad Vashem*, (Jerusalem, March 23, 2000. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), 14-16.

⁹² “Universal Prayer: Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness,” *Origins* 29 (2000), 645-648.

⁹³ John Paul II, “Prayer at the Western Wall,” Jerusalem, March 26, 2000.

6. THE LEGACY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

The contribution of Pope Benedict XVI to Jewish-Christian relations is more modest and controversial than that of Pope John Paul II. Among Pope Benedict's efforts to promote comity among Jews and Christians in a post-Holocaust age was his June 9, 2005 address to delegates of the International Jewish Committee. Here, the Pope praised the legacy of John Paul II in taking significant steps towards improving relations with the Jewish people and said, "It is my intention to continue on this path." He also spoke of the continuing need for cognizance of the profound ramifications of the Holocaust saying,

Remembrance of the past remains for both communities a moral imperative and a source of purification in our efforts to pray and work for reconciliation, justice, respect for human dignity and for that peace which is ultimately a gift from the Lord himself. Of its very nature this imperative must include a continued reflection on the profound historical, moral and theological questions presented by the experience of the Shoah.⁹⁴

Also significant was Pope Benedict's August 2005 visit to the Roonstrasse Synagogue in Cologne and his subsequent meeting with the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, in which he stressed the imperative of "continued reflection on the profound historical, moral, and theological questions presented by the experience of the Shoah."⁹⁵ At his January 2006 visit to the Vatican with Dr. Riccardo DiSegni, Chief Rabbi of Rome, Pope Benedict reaffirmed the "mutual esteem and trust" between Catholics and Jews that, he said, has come into being since Vatican II. "The Catholic Church is close to you and is your friend," the Pope stated, "Yes, we love you and we cannot fail to love you."⁹⁶

A more contentious aspect of Pope Benedict's pontificate was his 2008 revision of the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews, which constituted what many criticized as a considerable step backwards in Catholic-Jewish relations and an impediment to

⁹⁴ Address to Delegates of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, June 9, 2005.

⁹⁵ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050609_jewish-committee_en.html.

⁹⁶ See *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 164-174.

furthering reconciliation between Christians and Jews after centuries of animosity.⁹⁷ The 1970 version of the prayer, revised by Pope John IV and recited on Good Friday in the ordinary Rite of the Catholic Church, speaks positively of the Jews as God's chosen people and prays in hope that they "grow in the love of his [God's] name and in faithfulness to his covenant." While Pope Benedict did not eliminate the 1970 prayer, he approved a new prayer for use in the extraordinary (1962) Tridentine rite,⁹⁸ which says in part, "Let us pray also for the Jews: That our Lord and God may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus as the savior of all men." While Pope Benedict's revised version did expunge the distasteful language of "blindness" and "darkness" from the original Tridentine prayer, the authorization of a new version proved to be an incendiary stumbling block between Catholics and Jews.

The 1970 version of the Good Friday prayer "breathed the positive dialogical spirit of Vatican II"⁹⁹ as it speaks of the Jewish people with theological respect and dignity, as those who were "the first to hear the word of God." In contrast, the 2008 prayer, in appealing for enlightenment for the Jews, omits any explicit acknowledgement of Judaism's theological validity and, in essence, returns to the pre-1970 notion that the salvation of the Jews is contingent upon their conversion to

⁹⁷ See for example a letter by the Anti-Defamation League Director Abraham Foxman which expresses "concern that a revised Good Friday prayer that Jews abandon their own religious identity, would be devastating to the deepening relationship and dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people." http://archive.adl.org/interfaith/letter_pope_benedict.html#.VGMsUb7c5SU. Elsewhere, Foxman stated, "We are deeply troubled and disappointed that the framework and intention to petition God for Jews to accept Jesus as Lord was kept intact." http://archive.adl.org/presrele/vaticanjewish_96/5220_96-2.html#.VGMss77c5SU. For an argument that the 2008 revised Good Friday Prayer represents a regression from both the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* and the magisterial teachings John Paul II see Hans-Peter Heinz and Henry Brandt, "A New Burden on Christian-Jewish Relations: Statement of the Discussion Group 'Jews and Christians' of the Central Committee of German Catholics on the Good Friday Prayer 'For the Jews' in the Extraordinary Rite Version of 2008," *European Judaism* vol. 41.1 (2008): 159-61.

⁹⁸ In 2007, Pope Benedict promulgated the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* which loosened restrictions on the use of the pre-Vatican II Roman Missal of 1962, (the most recent form of the Tridentine Rite of the Mass), and ignited controversy regarding the appropriateness the current Good Friday "Prayer for the Conversion of the Jews," which read "Let us pray also for the Jews: that almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts; so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us pray. Almighty and eternal God, who does not exclude from thy mercy even the Jews: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of thy Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness."

⁹⁹ D. Pollefeyt and M. Moyaert, "Israel and the Church: Fulfillment beyond Supersessionism?" in *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 176.

Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Pope Benedict's alternations essentially created two authorized liturgical versions of the Good Friday Prayer, and gave expression to what Hans Henrix calls "a serious ambivalence in public ecclesial prayer for the Jews."¹⁰¹ Such ambiguity regarding how Catholics should conceive of Judaism and the Jewish people constituted an alarming deterioration of the Catholic-Jewish relationship and represents one of the more problematic aspects of Pope Benedict's legacy vis-à-vis the Jewish Other.¹⁰²

7. THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

While the promulgations of *Nostra Aetate*, *Guidelines* and *Notes* are not typically read by Catholic laypeople, a number of these theological revisions regarding Judaism and the Jewish people have been distilled in the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, placing them at the level of authoritative doctrine to be read, studied, and lived out by Catholics at all levels of the Catholic Church. The *Catechism* is arguably the most influential document for Catholics worldwide.

¹⁰⁰ For a fuller discussion on the differences between Pope Paul VI's and Pope Benedict XVI's Good Friday prayers, see Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, "Israel and the Church," 177. Here, Moyaert and Pollefeyt argue that with the 2008 revisions to the Good Friday Prayer, Pope Benedict has reverted to viewing the Church's relationship with Israel through a supersessionist lens—which essentially muddies the waters in respect to whether the Church is obligated to missionize the Jews. They note that the theological writings of Ratzinger do not make an explicit distinction between the notions of "fulfillment" and "replacement" (170) and that many of Pope Benedict's words and symbolic actions exhibit a clear departure from the desideratum of *Nostra Aetate*, which was to "overcome the problem of supersessionism" (163).

¹⁰¹ Hans Hermann Henrix, "The Controversy Surrounding the 2008 Good Friday Prayer in Europe: The Discussion and its Theological Implications" in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 3 (2008), 13.

¹⁰² For criticisms by Jews and Christians of Pope Benedict's Holocaust related actions, including amendments to the Good Friday Prayer see *No Going Back: Letters to Pope Benedict XVI on the Holocaust, Jewish-Christian Relations and Israel*, Carol Rittner and David Smith, eds. (London: Quill Press, 2009). For a discussion of the controversy the alterations to the prayer created in churches throughout Europe as well as criticisms from both Jewish and Catholic sources see Hans Hermann Henrix, "The Controversy Surrounding the 2008 Good Friday Prayer in Europe: The Discussion and its Theological Implications" in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 3 (2008) 1-19. For an anthology of German contributions on the Good Friday prayer see *Damit sie Jesus Christus erkenne: Die Neue Karfreitagsfürbitte für die Juden*, Walter Homolka and Erich Zenger eds. (Freiburg: Herder, 2008). Those interested in a more positive interpretation of the prayer should see Cardinal Walter Kasper's article "Striving for Mutual Respect in Modes of Prayer," *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition (2008), 8-9.

It is highly significant that the *Catechism* emphatically rejects any notion that the covenant with the Jewish people has been annulled or rejected. It stresses the irrevocability of the covenant God made with the Jewish people saying,

The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ; for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.¹⁰³

The *Catechism* quotes *Nostra Aetate* in refuting the notion that Jews are collectively responsible for Jesus' death: "neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion.... the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture." Accordingly, it continues, "We cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd."¹⁰⁴ The new catechism conveys that the responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion lies largely with pagan, imperial Rome (i.e. Gentiles) and only a few Jews in the time of Christ were guilty of collaborating with the Roman authorities in Jesus' death.¹⁰⁵

The *Catechism* also makes a number of references to highlight the close connection between Jesus and his Jewish context. It underscores that Jesus was a pious Jew who adhered to and practiced Jewish customs and laws throughout his lifetime. Thus, he in no way attempted to abolish Jewish law; rather "his religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the *Catechism* emphasized that "Jesus, Israel's Messiah and therefore the greatest in the kingdom of

¹⁰³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, § 839. Full text at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm>

¹⁰⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 597.

¹⁰⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 596, 572. Many biblical passages which have been used to malign and denigrate the Jewish people are removed or given more accurate commentary in the new catechism. For example, the controversial passage in Matthew 27:25 portrays Pontius Pilate washing his hands of responsibility for Jesus' death and portrays the Jewish people exclaiming "His blood be on us and on our children." These provocative words are tempered with the *Catechism's* rejection of any notion of corporate, trans-historic guilt for the death of Christ. In a similar fashion, the incendiary and oft-abused words of John 8:44 "Your father is the devil and you choose to carry out your Father's desires" have been expunged from the revised catechism.

¹⁰⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 531.

heaven, was to fulfill the Law by keeping it in its all-embracing detail—according to his own words, down to “the least of these commandments.”¹⁰⁷ With these words the document attempts to debunk the long-held notion that Judaism is characterized as a legalistic religion in opposition to the spirit and teachings of Christ.

The institution of the Temple is also cast in a fresh light. “Like the prophets before him” says the *Catechism*, “Jesus expressed the deepest respect for the Temple in Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁸ Jesus saw the Temple as the place where the living God was encountered; it was his zeal for the Temple which motivated him to drive out the money changers, not his rebellion against profiteering, perverse Jewish institutions. This reverence for the Temple would continue on with the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰⁹ The *Catechism* also dispels some of the enduring stereotypes about the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, arguing that Jesus actually held a close affinity with the Pharisaical teachings, sharing many of their core beliefs such as resurrection from the dead, fasting and prayer, addressing God as Father, and the love of God and neighbor.¹¹⁰

Likewise, the new catechism stresses a number of areas uniting Christians and Jews. For example both share a common liturgy and a common scripture. The *Catechism* maintains that Christian worship is nourished by the roots of the Jewish faith, thus a deeper understanding of Judaism’s people and religious life will help to illumine significant aspects of Christian worship and practice.¹¹¹ Jews and Christians are also united in their common expectation for the return of the Messiah and the culmination of God’s kingdom. “And when one considers the future, God’s People

¹⁰⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 578. See also § 577 and § 579.

¹⁰⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 583.

¹⁰⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 583 and § 586.

¹¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 575.

¹¹¹ Some examples given are “in the proclamation of the Word of God, the response to this word, prayer of praise and intercession for the living and the dead, invocation of God’s mercy. In its characteristic structure the Liturgy of the Word originates in Jewish prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical texts and formularies, as well as those of our most venerable prayers, including the Lord’s Prayer, have parallels in Jewish prayer. The Eucharistic Prayers also draw their inspiration from the Jewish tradition. The relationship between Jewish liturgy and Christian liturgy, but also their differences in content, are particularly evident in the great feasts of the liturgical year, such as Passover. Christians and Jews both celebrate the Passover. For Jews, it is the Passover of history, tending toward the future; for Christians, it is the Passover fulfilled in the death and Resurrection of Christ, though always in expectation of its definitive consummation. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1096).

of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah.¹¹²

8. SUMMARY

While it is difficult to ascertain precisely how the Catholic Church understands its own role during the Holocaust, it would appear that the Holocaust is seen primarily as animated by a modern, racial brand of antisemitism. This pagan antisemitism is envisioned as largely disconnected from Christian teaching about Jews and is believed to be utterly incompatible with the love of neighbor which Christianity has always proclaimed. As evident particularly in *We Remember*, there is still a great deal of ambiguity regarding Christianity's legacy of fostering hatred of Jews and the nature of antisemitism.

Following the thread of teaching throughout this survey of Roman Catholic Church statements on the Church and the Jewish people, some negative and positive assertions are discernable. Among the negative contentions are (1) a repudiation of the malignancy of antisemitism in all its manifold forms as utterly incompatible with Catholic teaching. (2) The Jewish people should not be presented as rejected by God, nor their religion portrayed negatively as one of fear and legalism without any positive value. (3) Jews are not collectively responsible for the execution of Jesus, neither those of his time or those living today; thus the infamous deicide charge is exorcised, once and for all time, from the annals of Catholic teaching. These negative assertions paved the way for some positive advances.

The first of three positive threads is (1) the resounding emphasis on the spiritual bond between Judaism and Christianity, which is evidenced in a wide variety of historical, biblical, liturgical, and doctrinal characteristics. Throughout these statements, the emphasis on the shared spiritual patrimony of Christians and Jews is striking and this common heritage necessitates that Christians learn about Judaism, in order to more fully grasp their own faith. In addition, these documents make it patently clear that the Christian obligation to study, remember, and explore the meaning of the Holocaust stems directly from this close familial relationship with Judaism.

¹¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 840.

Another positive thread discernable throughout these Roman Catholic documents is (2) the recognition that the Jews abide in an eternal covenant with God.¹¹³ Although only implicit within *Nostra Aetate*, it is explicitly reflected in many of Pope John Paul II's speeches which describe the Jewish people as "The people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God,"¹¹⁴ and "partners in a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked."¹¹⁵ While the soteriological implications are not firmly defined within these documents, it nevertheless remains a tremendously significant assertion.

A final noteworthy thread is that (3) Jews and Christians must learn to respect each other's efforts at self-definition. Thus, it is particularly incumbent upon Christians to seek to understand the Jewish people in light of their own religious experience, rather than through the filter of the Christian experience. In other words, the way Catholics present the Jewish people must be compatible with Jewish self-conceptions; and conceptions which cannot stand up to this test must be jettisoned as

¹¹³ For more on Christian theologies of the covenant with Israel see Steven J. McMichael, "The Covenant in Patristic and Medieval Christian Theology," in *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski, eds., (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 45-64; Jennifer A. Harris, "Enduring Covenant in the Christian Middle Ages," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44 (2009): 563-86; David J. Bolton, "Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: Contesting the Covenants," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45 (2010): 37-60; *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, Mary C. Boys, ed., (Sheed and Ward, 2005); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Jews and Christians: People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search for an Alternative for the Christian Theology of Substitution*, Didier Pollefeyt, (Leuven: Peeters, 1997);

¹¹⁴ See John Paul II, "Address to the Jewish Community in Mainz, West Germany" November 17, 1980 in *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Pope John Paul II: Texts on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1995*, Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 13-16.

¹¹⁵ John Paul II, "Address to Jewish Leaders in Miami" September 11, 1987 in *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, Fisher and Klenicki, eds., 105-109. Speaking of the "people of God" in the singular, rather than the plural seems to indicate that even though Jews do not share the Christian belief in Jesus Christ, they too, still partake in a covenantal relationship with God as the "people of God." It should be noted that there are different approaches within Catholicism concerning the question of how God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people is related to the "new" covenant with the church. These differences are reflected, for example, in discussions surrounding the 2002 document *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*, promulgated by representatives of the National Council of Synagogues and the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (USCCB). See Avery Dulles, "'Covenant and Mission,'" *America* 187:12 (2002) 8-11; Mary C. Boys, Philip A. Cunningham, and John T. Pawlikowski, "Theology's 'Sacred Obligation': A Reply to Cardinal Avery Dulles," *America* 187:12 (2002): 12-16; USCCB, Committee on Doctrine and Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, "A Note on Ambiguities Contained in 'Reflections on Covenant and Mission,'" *Origins* 39 (2009): 113-16; and American Jewish Leaders, "Letter to U.S. Bishops Expressing Concern about the Future of Interfaith Dialogue," *Origins* 39 (2009): 209-10.

inauthentic. This consequential notion, first promulgated in *Guidelines*,¹¹⁶ prompts Christians to cultivate authentic understandings of Jews and Judaism into their own faith perceptions. A key corollary of this notion is an emphasis on dialogue with the Jewish people in hopes that contemporary experiences with the living Jewish faith will result in “better mutual knowledge.”¹¹⁷

We now turn to explore the theological revisions in Jewish-Christian relations taking place within ecumenical ecclesial documents.

C. Ecumenical Church Statements

1. THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF THE WCC

(AMSTERDAM, 1948)

A year after the *Ten Points of Seelisberg*, the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches convened in Amsterdam and issued the statement *The Christian Approach to the Jews*. The WCC was established during a tumultuous time when the churches were rife with ambiguity about culpability for the Holocaust and the desire of churches to convert Jews was still very pervasive. Cognizant that they met in a country from which 110,000 Jews were murdered only a few short years ago, the delegates began the statement by declaring,

A concern for the Christian approach to the Jewish people confronts us inescapably, as we meet together to look with open and penitent eyes on man's disorder and to rediscover together God's eternal purpose for his Church...To the Jews our God has bound us in a special solidarity linking our destinies together in His design.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See the preamble of the 1974 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate (n.4)"* which says "On the practical level in particular, Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience."

¹¹⁷ *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate (n.4)"*, § I.

¹¹⁸ The "church's "special relationship"" with the Jewish people was made even more explicit in § 2, where the delegates said "'In the design of God, Israel has a unique position. It was Israel with whom God made his covenant by the call of Abraham. It was Israel to whom God revealed his name and gave his Law.'" Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London: Stimulus Books, 1977), 69.

After reiterating the Church's commission to preach the Gospel to all people, it states, "The fulfillment of this commission requires that we include the Jewish people in our evangelistic task."¹¹⁹ The next section expresses the "special meaning" which the Jewish people have for the Christian faith "in the design of God."¹²⁰ In light of the spiritual heritage which the Christians have received from the Jewish people, it says the Church is "bound to render it back in the light of the Cross. We have, therefore, in humble conviction to proclaim to the Jews, 'the Messiah for whom you wait has come'."¹²¹

Section three speaks of barriers to overcome before the churches can fulfill this commission to witness to the Jews. It acknowledges that Christians themselves have often helped to build these barriers and declares that Christians alone can remove them:

We must acknowledge in all humility that too often we have failed to manifest Christian love towards our Jewish neighbors, or even a resolute will for common social justice. We have failed to fight with all our strength the age-old disorder of man which anti-Semitism represents. The churches in the past have helped to foster an image of the Jews as the sole enemies of Christ, which has contributed to anti-Semitism in the secular world.¹²²

The statement summons all the churches to denounce antisemitism as "absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith," pronouncing Jew-hatred "a sin against God and man."¹²³ It is only when the Jewish neighbor has been given "convincing evidence" that antisemitism has been repudiated that there can be an opportunity for them to come together and share with them "the best which God has given us in Christ."¹²⁴

This evangelistic vein continues in the fourth tenet which explicates further the Christian mission to the Jewish People, making sure member churches conceive of evangelism as "a normal part of parish work, especially in those countries where

¹¹⁹ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 69.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 70.

¹²³ Ibid. Problematically, antisemitism is not defined and is left as a rather nebulous concept, nor consequently are specific ways in which antisemitism might be practically combatted.

¹²⁴ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 70.

Jews are members of the general community.”¹²⁵ Section five speaks of the emergence of the State of Israel and notes its potential to complicate antisemitism with a new political dimension. It says of the “Palestine problem and the complex conflict of ‘rights’ involved we do not undertake to express a judgment.”¹²⁶

2. THE THIRD ASSEMBLY OF THE WCC (NEW DELHI, 1961)

The Third WCC Assembly’s *Resolution on Anti-Semitism* was issued in the wake of a resurgence of antisemitism and began by recalling the words addressed to the churches at the First Assembly of the WCC in 1948:

We call upon all the churches we represent to denounce anti-Semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man.¹²⁷

The Assembly reminded its member churches that Jews are still being subject to persecution and discrimination and implored them to “do all in their power to resist every form of anti-Semitism.”¹²⁸

The resolution also rejected the notion, deeply intertwined with the Christian narrative, that Jews today bear the guilt for the death of Christ.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 70. Ironically, while renouncing antisemitism, “no matter what its origin” as irreconcilable with the Christian faith, the document leaves the very cornerstone of Christian supersessionism firmly in place as signaled by the document’s insistence on missionizing the Jewish people. The concluding recommendations charge the WCC member churches once more, that they “seek to recover the universality of our Lord’s commission by including the Jewish people in their evangelistic work,” while at the same time encouraging members to cooperate in combating misunderstanding and prejudice. Curiously, there seems to be no sense of an inherent contradiction between the missionary enterprise and the call to combat misunderstanding and prejudice.

¹²⁶ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 71.

¹²⁷ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 72. It is interesting that the Third Assembly recalled the First Assemblies repudiation of antisemitism, but disassociates it from the document’s connected confession that acknowledges the Christian contribution to antisemitism; that “The churches in the past have helped to foster an image of the Jews as the sole enemies of Christ, which has contributed to anti-Semitism in the secular world.” Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 70.

¹²⁸ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 73.

¹²⁹ Franklin Sherman, ed., *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Volume One (1945-1985)* (New York: Stimulus, 2011), 267. Notably, the Vatican was concurrently expunging the deicide calumny with *Nostra Aetate*.

In Christian teaching, the historical events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity and not to one race or community.¹³⁰

The New Delhi statement, while short, was powerful in reminding churches that antisemitism was incompatible with Christian teaching. It called the churches to recognize the need for pedagogical reformation in their perceptions and presentations of the Jewish people.

3. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION (BRISTOL, 1967)

In 1967, the report *The Church and the Jewish People* was jointly undertaken by the Faith and Order Commission and the WCC Committee on the Church and the Jewish people. Known as the *Bristol Report* because the commission met in Bristol, England, it sought to explore the theological implications of the Church's relation to the Jewish people in a "more explicit and systematic way."¹³¹ The document's objective was to answer two questions, namely, (1) how is the continuing existence of the Jews theologically significant for the Church, and (2) how should Christians witness to the Jews?¹³²

The document turned to a reflection upon historical considerations. It noted the historical developments that led the two faith communities to separate and lamented that in the past, Jews who were outside the Christian faith elicited very little serious theological consideration. It confirmed that, contrary to Marcionism, there is a strong connection between the two faiths and expressed grief that "only

¹³⁰ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 73.

¹³¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 269.

¹³² The document stated the main reason for this interest in theologically reflecting on the Jewish people "is probably the greater emphasis on biblical theology and the increased interest which the Old Testament in particular has received. It is self-evident that this emphasis was to a great extent caused by the preceding outbreak of antisemitism in Germany and its rationalization on so-called Christian, ideological ground." Sherman, *Bridges*, 272.

few Christians have been aware that this common root meant some kind of special relationship.”¹³³

Two historical events summoned the churches to contemplate their relationship with the Jewish people in a deeper way. Alluding to the atrocities of Holocaust, “in which some six million Jews were annihilated in the most terrible way,” the document said that “The churches came to ask themselves whether this was simply the consequence of natural human wickedness, or whether it had also another, theological dimension.”¹³⁴ After posing this question, it spoke of the formation of the state of Israel, which has great import for the Jewish people, but “has also brought suffering and injustice to the Arab people.”¹³⁵

The next section makes a number of claims about the Jewish people and their function, saying “God chose this particular people to be the bearer of a particular promise and to act as his covenant-partner and special instrument.”¹³⁶ In this way, the Jewish people might become, “a living revelation to others.”¹³⁷ It continued,

¹³³ Furthermore, it continued, “The first community of Christians were Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Christ. They continued to belong to the Jewish communities and the relationship between them and their fellow-Jews was close, notwithstanding the tension that existed between them.” Sherman, *Bridges*, 272.

¹³⁴ Sherman, *Bridges*, 273.

¹³⁵ Sherman, *Bridges*, 273. Even though the State of Israel was in existence since 1948 when the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches initially met, it only became a significant issue on the Jewish-Christian agenda after the Six Day War of 1967. While the Bristol Report described the formation of Israel as of tremendous importance for the great majority of Jews, curiously, the Fourth Assembly of the WCC, held at Uppsala in July 1968, barely one year after the Six-Day War, would be largely silent about the State of Israel’s import for the Jewish people. The assembly passed a resolution called *Statement on the Middle East* which described the alarming events taking place in the Middle East and said “It is the special responsibility of the World Council of Churches and its member churches to discern ways in which religious factors affect the conflict. See *The Uppsala Report 1968*, Norman Goodall ed., (Geneva, WCC, 1968), 189. In a similar fashion, the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, which met in Nairobi in 1975, passed two resolutions, *The Middle East* and *Jerusalem*. Again, these statements did not reflect on the State of Israel theologically but only politically. They underscored the sacredness of the Holy Places, pleaded for a cessation of hostilities, and expressed hope for greater cooperation between Israel and its neighbors. The statement closes with “The Assembly expresses its profound hope and fervent prayers for the peace and welfare of the Holy City and all its inhabitants.” See David M. Patton, ed., *Breaking Barriers, the official report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 162-165. The Sixth Assembly of the WCC, which met in Vancouver in 1983, adopted a more in-depth *Statement on the Middle East*, which addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and situations in Lebanon, and Jerusalem. While it spoke of the importance of interfaith dialogue and standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, it offered no theological reflection specifically on the Jewish people.

¹³⁶ Sherman, *Bridges*, 273.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

We are convinced that the Jewish people still have a significance of their own for the Church...by their very existence in spite of all attempts to destroy them, they make it manifest that God has not abandoned them. In this way they are a living and visible sign of God's faithfulness to men, an indication that he also upholds those who do not find it possible to recognize him in his Son.¹³⁸

The document portrayed the dual role which the Jewish people play with respect to the salvation of humankind: through them salvation has come to the world—and at the same time they represent “man's rejection of God's salvation offered in Christ.”¹³⁹

Building on previous WCC statements, the drafters began to grapple in earnest with whether it is theologically appropriate to target Jews in their efforts of evangelism, particularly in the shadow of the terrible burden of discrimination, which Christians share with the world and which culminated in the obliteration of a large part of European Jews. After acknowledging the shameful history of Christian anti-Judaism they said,

We all have to realize that Christian words have now become disqualified and suspect in the ears of most Jews. Therefore, often the best, and sometimes even the only, way in which Christians today can testify to the Jewish people about their faith in Christ may be, not so much in explicit words, but rather in service.¹⁴⁰

The report noted that there are differing views among the member churches, related to the concept of missions to the Jews and the question of which ecclesiological conceptualizations should be stressed. If the Church is primarily envisioned as “the body of Christ” then it must be conceded that Jews are outside and do, in fact, need to be brought in (along with all other people of non-Christian faith). However, if the Church is instead regarded above all, as “the people of God,” then it is conceivable that both Christians and the Jewish people could constitute the

¹³⁸ The document goes on to strongly repudiate any notion that the suffering which the Jewish people have endured throughout the ages is “proof of any special guilt.” It continues, “Why, in God's purpose, they have suffered in that way, we as outsiders do not know. What we do know, however, is the guilt of Christians who have all too often stood on the side of the persecutors instead of the persecuted.” Sherman, *Bridges*, 275.

¹³⁹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 276-277.

¹⁴⁰ Sherman, *Bridges*, 279.

one people of God. A repercussion of this latter perspective for the task of evangelism would be that the Church would approach its relationship with Jews in a manner that is fundamentally different than its approach to all others who do not believe in Christ. The report suggested that this latter perspective means the Church's relationship with the Jews should be envisioned more in terms of ecumenical engagement than missionary witness aimed at conversion. While leaving room for both options, the document remarked "the conversation among us has only just begun" and claimed that in this matter "the entire self-understanding of the Church is at stake."¹⁴¹

The final section spelled out some implications of the study. It reiterated the import of teaching the passion of Christ, so as not to heap blame upon the Jewish people and further exacerbate the malady of antisemitism. Moreover, it called for the churches to reevaluate traditional liturgies, lessons, prayers, and hymns to purge them of antisemitic vestiges. Because the Jewish people have "continued significance for the Church," this should deeply transform pedagogy about the Jews and Judaism.¹⁴² Moreover, Christians must eschew the simplistic and superficial practice of equating the "Old" Testament faith with the Jews of today. The section ends by cautioning, "We should always remain aware that we are dealing with actual, living people in all their variety, and not with an abstract concept of our own."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 277. Here the Bristol report represents a radical break (or at least the possibility of a break) with the traditional ecclesiological paradigm which maintained that the church is the "New Israel," having displaced and replaced the Jewish people. The Bristol report portends a hopeful alternative to this ecclesiology which is formed over and against the Jewish people, saying that potentially *both* Israel and the church could belong to the one people of God.

¹⁴² Sherman, *Bridges*, 283.

¹⁴³ While the mandate to evangelize Jews goes largely unquestioned here, the drafters do "emphatically reject any form of 'proselytizing' in the derogatory sense. It is not clearly spelled out what constitutes 'derogatory' but they do call for 'real openness' as well as 'a willingness to listen to what the other has to say, and a readiness to be questioned by him and learn from his insights.'" This section signifies the first time within ecumenical discourse that the concept of dialogue with the Jews is spelled out and encouraged. Christians are prompted to begin a new epoch of talking *with* Jews, instead of simply talking *at* or *about* them. *Bridges*, 280-283.

4. THE FAITH AND ORDER STUDY GROUP

(1973)

In 1973, the Study Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, composed of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox scholars, submitted a *Statement to Our Fellow Christians*.¹⁴⁴ It began with the oft-heard declaration, “The Church of Christ is rooted in the life of the People Israel,” and emphasized once again that the Church is sustained by the faith of the patriarchs, prophets, scribes, and rabbis.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Christians are encouraged to study carefully post-biblical Judaism up to the present day. A point in the third section bears particular mention for the way Jewish survival is understood as significant:

The singular grace of Jesus Christ does not abrogate the covenantal relationship of God with Israel (Rom 11:1-2)...The survival of the Jewish people, despite the barbaric persecutions and the cruel circumstances under which they were forced to live, is a sign of God’s continuing fidelity to the people dear to him.¹⁴⁶

The statement expressed gratitude for all the Jews have done in bestowing a spiritual legacy, showing appreciation to the Jewish people “whom God has chosen as special instruments of his kindness.”¹⁴⁷ Section four says, it is the new ecumenical environment as well as “the tragic reality of the Holocaust” that prompts reconsideration of the relationship of Christians to Jews. “There is strong scriptural support for the position that God’s covenantal love for the Jewish people remains firm. The continuity of contemporary Judaism with ancient Israel demonstrates the abiding validity of Jewish worship and life as authentic forms of service to the true God.”¹⁴⁸

Section five took up the issue of Christian culpability for “fierce persecution” of the Jews throughout the centuries,¹⁴⁹ understood as both “fratricidal strife” and

¹⁴⁴ The “Study Group on Christian-Jewish Relations,” has held meetings since 1969 under the joint auspices of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

¹⁴⁵ Sherman, *Bridges*, 285.

¹⁴⁶ Sherman, *Bridges*, 286.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

immense human tragedy.¹⁵⁰ It recognized that the appalling history of Christian preaching and teaching which misrepresented and condemned Jews as Christ-killers is a sin that has been a “perennial feature of Christendom.”¹⁵¹ Antisemitism was portrayed as a “Pandora’s box from which spring out not only atrocities against the Jews but also contempt for Christ.”¹⁵² In the recommendations, Christians are summoned to appreciate and act on God’s love for the Jewish people in a number of practical ways, e.g., using sensitivity and balance in the utilization of New Testaments texts which have the potential to reflect negatively on Jews; teaching from the pulpits in ways that illustrate the positive qualities of Jews, Judaism, and the “Old” Testament; and being receptive to the variety of ways in which God’s love is manifested in the Jewish experience.¹⁵³

5. ECUMENICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE (GENEVA, 1982)

The document *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue* was prepared by the World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People and commended to the churches for study and action in 1982. It began by describing the function of dialogue, that is, to clear away prejudice and stereotyping and make way for hearing the neighbor’s own understanding of who they are. It states, “It is out of a reciprocal willingness to listen and learn that significant dialogue grows.”¹⁵⁴ There are a number of complexities stemming from the relationship between Christians and Jews, particularly because of how Christianity emerged out of Judaism, and because of Christianity’s long legacy of cultivating its identity over and against the Jewish people:

In the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue a specific historical and theological asymmetry is obvious. While an understanding of Judaism in New Testament times becomes an integral and indispensable part of any Christian theology, for Jews, a “theological” understanding of Christianity

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 287.

¹⁵² Sherman, *Bridges*, 289.

¹⁵³ Sherman, *Bridges*, 290-291.

¹⁵⁴ Helga Croner, *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations: an Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents, 1975-1983* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 168. See pages 167-174 for the complete document.

is of a less than essential or integral significance. Yet, neither community of faith has developed without awareness of the other.¹⁵⁵

Cognizant of the asymmetries involved when Christians seek a dialogical relationship with Jews, Christians are encouraged to listen carefully and to seek to understand Jewish history, traditions, and faith “in their own terms.”¹⁵⁶ In addition, when dialoging with Jews, Christians must not be myopic to the perennial pattern of hatred and persecution against the Jews, which has been soundly condemned as a “sin against God and man.”¹⁵⁷ Turning directly to the Holocaust, the document confesses that “Teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism in certain Christian traditions proved a spawning ground for the evil of the Nazi Holocaust.”¹⁵⁸ Henceforth, the Gospel must be preached in a manner that ensures it will never again become fodder for contempt against Judaism and the Jewish people.¹⁵⁹ Christians must resolve that the Holocaust will never happen again to the Jews or to any other people.

The final section takes up the notion of authentic Christian witness, declaring “Christians are called to witness to their faith in word and deed. The Church has a mission and it cannot be otherwise. This mission is not one of choice.”¹⁶⁰ Christian witness has too often been skewed by “coercive proselytism—conscious and unconscious, over and subtle.”¹⁶¹ While concurring that coercion is never permissible,

¹⁵⁵ Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 168-169.

¹⁵⁶ Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 169.

¹⁵⁷ Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 173.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ The document does not conjecture or spell out in any depth what such a Gospel might look like, nor does it offer any concrete steps that might suggest that such a Gospel, wholly free of contempt for the Jewish people, is even possible at all.

¹⁶⁰ Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 173.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. It expands with a statement by the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches saying “Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters.” *The Ecumenical Review*, no. 1, (1971): 11. A similar notion is expounded in the conference paper adopted by the Jerusalem Conference of the World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish people, which convened in Jerusalem in 1977. After repudiating proselytism it says, “This rejection of proselytism and our advocacy of respect for the integrity and the identity of all peoples and faith-communities is the more urgent where Jews are concerned. For, as stated above, our relationship to the Jews is of a unique and very close character... We reject proselytism both in its gross and more refined forms. This implies that all triumphalism and every kind of manipulation are to be abrogated. We are called upon to minimize the power dimension in our encounter with the Jews and to speak at every level from equal to equal. We have to be conscious of the pain and the perception of the others and have to respect their right to define themselves.” Sherman, *Bridges*, 305-

Ecumenical Considerations says there is no consensus on what constitutes authentic forms of mission to the Jewish people. A wide spectrum of positions is outlined, ranging from enthusiastic support of a missionary position to those who aver that this kind of stance is illegitimate because the Jewish people are fulfilled through the promises of the old covenant.¹⁶²

306. While there is no consensus concerning Christian evangelism towards the Jews, nearly every ecclesial statement here agrees that proselytism is strongly verboten. These statements reflect there is still great diversity regarding whether the Church's mission involves converting Jews to Christianity or whether it should be understood more in terms of a shared mission, working alongside the Jews as co-partners in the kingdom of God. For more Roman Catholic perspectives on this debate see: Mary Boys, "Does the Catholic Church Have a Mission 'with' Jews or 'to' Jews?," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 3 (2008) 1-19; David J. Bolton, "Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: Contesting the Covenants," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45 (2010) 37-60; Gavin G. D'Costa "What Does the Catholic Church Teach About Mission to the Jewish People?" *Theological Studies* 73 (2012); and *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, Philip A Cunningham and Norbert J. Hofmann eds., (Fordham University Press, 2007).

Does missions to the Jews essentially deny the otherness of the Jewish Other? Yes, if by missions we mean the hegemonic attempt to essentially rewrite the religious identity of the Other. Perhaps the term witness would be more helpful here. Witness is what takes place as Christians share the richness and beauty of their faith with the Other in a way that is dialogical, non-triumphalist, and capable of respecting and learning from the Other. Conceived this way, witness is essential for a genuine embrace of the Other, for inherent in the concept of embrace is vulnerability and the sharing of one's authentic self. Witness, however, must not turn into what Volf describes as a "bear hug" which would blur the boundaries between ourselves and the Other. Our questions concerning Christian witness must go broader than merely asking how we might respect the Jewish Other, but must be stretched to ponder whether we can discern God's presence at work amidst other religions as well. Peter Phan points out a broader problematic implication of the tendency to privilege the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism. He says contending that Christians should have no organized missions to the Jews has "the unfortunate effect of making Judaism...the 'model minority' and undervaluing the presence of God in other religions." "Judaism and Christianity: Reading Cardinal Koch's Address Between the Lines and Against the Grain. in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 7 (2012), 6. On the other hand, a simplistic pluralistic approach that seeks to boil all religions down to a conceptual normative model is also a highly problematic way to approach to the religious Other. Nicholas Healy rightly reminds us that unlike in religious pluralism, the church can confidently acknowledge the rationality and integrity of other religions even though it may disagree with them. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 100. He suggests the church become an "agent for particularity" teaching its members to confess that both they and adherents of other religions "make and embody claims that may logically conflict with others." For Healy, to be an agent of particularity is an indispensable part of the church's prophetic task—in order to help those who are vulnerable and less powerful to flourish *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 102.

¹⁶² Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 174. This document gives a fascinating glimpse into the dialogue taking place in the churches about how to understand the mandate of the Great Commission and its implications for witness to the Jews. Here we see tentative steps toward the possibility that the covenant between God and the Jewish people remains salvific; thus Jews should not be conceived of on the same level as pagans or those of other non-Christian faiths. This understanding of abrogated covenant would be vital in opening a new stage in the churches' understanding of their relationship to Jews and Judaism.

6. CHRISTIAN-JEWISH DIALOGUE BEYOND CANBERRA '91

(1992)

In 1992, the World Council of Churches Central Committee adopted *Christian-Jewish Dialogue Beyond Canberra '91*.¹⁶³ The document begins by harkening back to the significant affirmations made in the WCC's *The Churches and the Jewish People: Towards a New Understanding* issued in 1988 in Sigtuna, Sweden. The Sigtuna document clearly (1) articulates the conviction that God's covenant with the Jewish people has enduring value; (2) repudiates antisemitism and all varieties of the teaching of contempt; (3) calls the living tradition of Judaism "a gift of God" and acknowledges that the permanent calling of the Jewish people is a sign of God's faithfulness; (4) asserts that proselytism is irreconcilable with the Christian faith; (5) and recognizes that both Jews and Christians bear a joint responsibility as witnesses of God's righteousness and collaborators in the quest for a more just world.¹⁶⁴

After reaffirming these theological points, the statement elucidates a number of commitments, concerns, and challenges, which it would like to see Jewish-Christian dialogue grapple with in the future. First, is the desire to construct new avenues and partnerships; those mentioned are: consultations on faith and liberation theology, expanding the role and contribution of women within Jewish-Christian dialogue, and the call for greater dialogue between Jews and Orthodox Christians. There is also an invitation for a wider spectrum of diversity within Jewish-Christian dialogue, envisioned as bringing Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America into the conversation in order to emphasize the universal nature of the church. The statement renews the commitment to cultivating Christian-Jewish dialogue in areas of the world beyond the North Atlantic, so as to incorporate theological insights and experiences from Christians and Jews in other regions of the world.

7. CONCLUSION

There are remarkable parallels between the theological revisions within Roman Catholicism and those found within ecumenical ecclesial statements. The Holocaust, not mentioned explicitly until the 1973 *A Statement to our Fellow Christians*, is

¹⁶³For the full text of the statement *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, see <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/ecumenical-christian/732-wcc1992>.

¹⁶⁴ *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, § a, § b, § c, § d, and § e.

understood as bringing to light the imperative need to reexamine the Christian-Jewish relationship, particularly as it pertains to the church's legacy of antisemitism—which is renounced in the starkest of terms. Whereas previous Roman Catholic statements “decry” or “condemn” antisemitism, here it is understood soundly as “a sin against God and man.” Unfortunately, there is still a lack of clarity about what actually constitutes antisemitism (e.g. should Christians continue to evangelize Jews?) as well as how antisemitism might practically be combatted within the churches.

One of the most prominent themes, echoed in Catholic documents, is that the destiny of Christians is irrevocably fused with that of the Jewish people, on account of their common origins. Already in 1948, almost twenty years before the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate*, the First World Council of Churches declared: “To the Jews our God has bound us in a special solidarity linking our destinies together in His design.”¹⁶⁵ The notion that Christians are profoundly connected to Jews because of their shared roots has become a fundamental aspect of Christian self-understanding since the Holocaust. It is on *this* basis that antisemitism is staunchly condemned as a sin for Christians—for to detest the Jew is to hate an indispensable part of oneself. Judaism functions, therefore, as the very lifeblood of the Church, and this reality must be incorporated practically into the ways in which the Jewish people are presented in ecclesiastical teaching and preaching. Among some of the specific points of linkage which ecumenical documents bring to light are: a common Scripture,¹⁶⁶ a common liturgy, a common connection through the Jewishness of Jesus and the apostles, and a common responsibility for the betterment of the world.

The other major theme which begins to materialize here is that the covenant of God with the Jewish people remains valid, a notion which has profound and still-evolving ecclesiological implications; a corollary of this contention is that the traditional concept of missions must be reconsidered vis-à-vis the Jewish people. While a spectrum of views about what this means for the churches' missionary

¹⁶⁵ *The Christian Approach to the Jews*, § Introduction.

¹⁶⁶ As the 1967 Bristol Report says, “The documents of the Old Testament belong to the heritage which the churches have received from and have in common with the Jews.” Sherman, *Bridges* 280 (*Bristol Report*, § V.1).

endeavors is evident within these documents, it is agreed that coercive proselytism directed towards Jews is verboten for Christians.

D. Protestant Church Statements

This section will highlight a sampling of ecclesial statements about the Church and the Jewish people, issued by Protestant denominations and various national and regional bodies in Europe and North America. Due to the prolific number of statements, only the most salient points will be surveyed in order to allow for as many voices as possible to be heard. The ecclesial statements developed in Germany in the immediate post-war period were often characterized by evasiveness regarding the churches' role in the Holocaust and were tepid in their confession of Christianity's legacy of fostering enmity towards Jews and Judaism. Beginning with these ambiguous statements, it will become clear how far the dialogue has come these past seventy years.

1. THE *EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND*

(STUTTGART, 1945)

In October of 1945, the council of the Evangelical (Protestant) Church in Germany welcomed delegates of the World Council of Churches to its meeting in Stuttgart. Their statement, commonly referred to as *The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt*, is "the most controversial declaration of guilt in the immediate post-war years."¹⁶⁷ The document contained only six brief paragraphs. The first section spoke of the great suffering that has been reaped upon many peoples and countries, as well as the great guilt:

We have for many years struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of tyranny, but we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 76. See chapter four for more of the history of the statement, as well as its reception in post-war Germany and abroad.

¹⁶⁸ Sherman, *Bridges*, 41.

The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, in spite of its name, does not grapple to any real extent with the notions of guilt and responsibility for the Nazi past, nor does it mention the Jews or the behavior or the churches during this time. It does, however, end on an optimistic note claiming that a new beginning can be made within churches, as they “now proceed to cleanse themselves from influences alien to the faith and to set themselves in order.”¹⁶⁹

2. THE COUNCIL OF BRETHREN OF THE EVANGELICAL CONFERENCE (DARMSTADT, 1947)

The 1947 *Message Concerning the Jewish Question* offered an explanation regarding the failure of the German churches under the reign of the Third Reich:

We went astray when we began to dream about a special German mission, as if the German character could heal the sickness of the world. In doing so, we prepared the way for the unrestricted exercise of political power, and set our own nation on the throne of God....We went astray when we thought we ought to create a political front of good against evil, light against darkness, justice against injustice, and to resort to political methods....We went astray when we failed to see that the economic materialism of Marxist teaching ought to have reminded the Church of its task and its promise for the life and fellowship of men. We have failed to take up the cause of the poor and unprivileged as a Christian cause, in accordance with the message of God's kingdom.¹⁷⁰

The statement confessed that because of these failures, retribution is being meted out on the German people for what was done to the Jews. The failure of the German churches is further diagnosed by saying that the churches forgot what Israel really is, thus they no longer loved the Jews, nor believed that the promises concerning them were still valid. In this way, because of their lost love for the Jews, Christians helped to bring about all the injustice and suffering inflicted upon the Jewish people in Germany.

¹⁶⁹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 42.

¹⁷⁰ Translation is from the *Ecumenical Press Service* 31 (September 12, 1947): 215.

After this acknowledgement, we read, “Through Christ, and since Christ, the chosen people is no longer Israel but the Church, ...the Church is waiting for the erring Children of Israel to resume the place reserved for them by God.”¹⁷¹ The terror that befell the Jews is reckoned as “a silent sermon, reminding us that God will not allow Himself to be mocked.”¹⁷² Here, the fate of the Jews under the Third Reich is interpreted as a clarion call to turn to God, who is the only hope of salvation. The final section of the statement appeals to churches and pastors to refrain from all forms of antisemitism—and to be cognizant of their special relationship (i.e. the “mysterious link” which was “created by God in His wisdom”) with Israel.¹⁷³

3. THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

(SAXONY, 1948)

The Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony issued a forthright statement, *Declaration of Guilt Towards the Jewish people* in 1948. It began by confessing,

We feel it a matter of deep shame that the most comprehensive and terrible attempt at the forceful extermination of Jewry that world history has ever known was undertaken in the name of the German people.... Insofar as racial hatred has been fostered among us or simply has been tolerated without vigorous resistance, we share in the guilt. Also our Saxon church contributed to the persecution of Jews, even including Christian Jews. Starting in 1933, the church leadership of that time proceeded methodically to expel Jewish Christians from the Christian community. Many pastors and congregations remained silent about this; indeed, many even personally assumed this attitude. Even though there were some conscious Christian efforts to counteract this, the fracture of church community with the Jews led in fact to a denial of the essential nature of the church.¹⁷⁴

This early statement stands out prominently among ecclesial pronouncements in the immediate post-war period by its candid admission that the Saxon church shares in the guilt for cultivating, or at least tolerating, hatred toward Jews—even

¹⁷¹ Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 196 (*Message Concerning the Jewish Question*, II.2).

¹⁷² Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 196 (*Message Concerning the Jewish Question*, § II.5).

¹⁷³ Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 197 (*Message Concerning the Jewish Question*, § III).

¹⁷⁴ Sherman, *Bridges*, 45.

contempt toward those Jewish Christians who were already a part of the ecclesial community. It is particularly noteworthy that the statement recognizes the ecclesiological implications of this rupture, confessing that it constituted “a denial of the essential nature of the church”¹⁷⁵ although the precise implications of this confession are left unexplored.

4. SYNOD OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN GERMANY

(BERLIN-WEISSENSEE, 1950)

In 1950, the Weissensee synod of the Protestant Church of Germany passed a *Statement on the Jewish Question (Wort Zur Judenfrage)*. The statement begins by acknowledging belief in a Savior who came from the people of Israel; and a church which is joined together as one body of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. It professes that the promises of God remain valid for the Jewish people, even after the crucifixion of Jesus and acknowledges “through neglect and silence before a merciful God, we are complicit in the crimes which members of our people have committed against the Jews.”¹⁷⁶ The statement closes with a plea: “We entreat all Christians to renounce all antisemitism and wherever it arises anew, to earnestly stand against it, and to treat Jews and Jewish Christians with a spirit of brotherhood.”¹⁷⁷

The Weissensee statement is often considered the first official acknowledgment of the German churches’ political and theological complicity in the atrocities of the Holocaust. For this reason it is sometimes referred to as the *Statement of Guilt Regarding Israel*.

¹⁷⁵ Sherman, *Bridges*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* 1950, Gütersloh 1951, 5ff (translation mine).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. Also in the 1950s, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands broke new theological ground when in their 1951 constitution; they included a special report which distinguished between dialogue with the Jewish people and missionizing them. In explicating these two different approaches, they are noted as the first church body in history to make this differentiation. For the complete statement see Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 49-50.

5. LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
(LØGUMKLOSTER, DENMARK, 1964)

The first significant Protestant statement originating outside of Germany¹⁷⁸ regarding Jewish-Christian relations was issued by the Lutheran World Federation, representing 65 million Lutherans worldwide. The statement *The Church and the Jewish People* emerged from a series of international conferences beginning in Løgumkloster Denmark in 1964. The Løgumkloster report begins by prevailing upon its member churches to eradicate and oppose false generalizations about the Jews which lead to unbiblical divisions in the church. Those who have been baptized and put on Christ are all Christians, regardless of whether their origin is in the “people of the old covenant or among the Gentiles.”¹⁷⁹

The statement next speaks of the need to evangelize the Jewish people, which stems from the commission received from Christ. It is the Christian responsibility to try to understand both the Jewish people and their faith. Therefore, “responsible conversations” among Christians and Jews are both desired and welcomed.¹⁸⁰ However these conversations should “not assume an equating of the religions, nor do they require that Christians abstain from making their witness as a natural outgrowth of the discussions.”¹⁸¹

The statement closes with an admonishment that antisemitism “represents a demonic form of rebellion against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and a rejection of Jesus the Jew, directed upon his people. ‘Christian’ antisemitism is spiritual suicide.”¹⁸² It beseeches Christians to take concrete steps to overcome antisemitism both inside and outside of the church, noting that the mendacity that the Jews bear the guilt for Christ’s death, rather than all of humankind, is particularly reprehensible.

¹⁷⁸ Aside from the WCC Statements in which Protestant churches participated, the first of which was the 1946 *Resolution on Antisemitism and the Jewish Situation*, Geneva.

¹⁷⁹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 55.

¹⁸⁰ Sherman, *Bridges*, 56 (*The Church and the Jewish People*, § II.C).

¹⁸¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 56-57 (*The Church and the Jewish People*, § II.C).

¹⁸² Sherman, *Bridges*, 56.

6. GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
(U.S.A., 1964)

The erroneous charge of deicide was also being expunged concurrently within the United States, reflected in documents such as the Episcopal Church's 1964 *Deicide and the Jews*. This terse statement begins by illustrating how the "poison of antisemitism" is often justified by a misreading of the events of Jesus' crucifixion.¹⁸³ It laments that "loveless attitudes" within the Church throughout the ages, including the calumny of deicide, have spawned persecution toward the Jewish people, and caused them to be averse towards the "un-Christ-like witness" of Christians. Thus the House of Bishops rejects the deicide accusation and condemns all "unchristian accusations" against the Jews.¹⁸⁴

7. NETHERLANDS REFORMED CHURCH
(1970)

The General Synod of the Netherland's Reformed Church adopted the detailed study *Israel: People, Land and State: Suggestions for a Theological Evaluation* in 1970.¹⁸⁵ It offered an in-depth exploration of the theological significance of the State of Israel, pondering whether the State of Israel has any special relevance for the Christian faith. The document contends that biblical Israel has, in fact, not disappeared, but is present in the Jewish people today who are the continuation of the Israel of the Bible. However, a warning is issued against reckoning that the Jewish people today are indistinguishable with the biblical people. There are admittedly differences resulting from nineteen centuries of history—but a direct historical line runs from the Israel of old to the people of today. Because contemporary Christians feel connected to the Israel of the Bible, by implication they are connected in an intimate way to the present-day Jewish people, and thus to the State of Israel. Accordingly,

The church is called upon to proclaim its faith in God and its connection with the people of Israel is part of this proclamation...Today the State of

¹⁸³ Sherman, *Bridges*, 59.

¹⁸⁴ Sherman, *Bridges*, 59-60.

¹⁸⁵ See: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/743-rcn70june> for the complete text.

Israel is one of the forms in which the Jewish people appear. We would be talking in a void and closing our eyes to reality, if today we were to think about the Jewish people without taking the State of Israel explicitly into consideration.¹⁸⁶

8. UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

(ATLANTA, 1972)

In 1972, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted *Bridges in Hope: Jewish-Christian Dialogue*.¹⁸⁷ The document acknowledged that Jews have in particular been victims of “systematic oppression and injustice more recurrently and more barbarously than have Christians.”¹⁸⁸ Christians are entreated to be conscious of both the common origins they share with the Jewish people, as well as the history of alienation towards the Jews. Christians are “obliged to examine their own implicit and explicit responsibility for the discrimination against and for organized extermination of Jews, as in the recent past.”¹⁸⁹ This investigation calls for repentance and a firm resolve to reject all manifestations of injustice in the future.

The document also speaks of the need for dialogue with Jews, lamenting that in the past “We have talked past one another instead of with each other.”¹⁹⁰ Some of the guidelines and recommendations made are that Christians must make clear that they do not condone the history of persecution committed against the Jewish people, nor do they brook antisemitism on biblical or theological grounds. The document recommends that Christians and Jews study jointly those aspects of their traditions

¹⁸⁶ The 1970 General Synod of the Netherland’s Reformed Church, *Israel: People, Land and State: Suggestions for a Theological Evaluation*, § I.1. In Amersfoort, 1981, the Declaration of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands examined the close ties they have with the Jewish people and speaks of God’s unfailing faithfulness to the Jewish people saying, “The promises which the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has made to the Jewish people have never been revoked by their God, who is our God, too. Nor did God ever recall the covenant which He, through Moses, had made with them. We Christians call this covenant—by a term which has occasioned much misunderstanding—the ‘old covenant.’ This covenant was not abolished or replaced by the “new covenant” in and through the coming of Jesus Christ.” Complete text of the declaration is found in Croner, *More Stepping Stones*, 210-215.

¹⁸⁷ For complete text see: Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (Stimulus Books, 1977) 114-118. The statement *Building New Bridges in Hope* was adopted in 1996 by the General Council of the United Methodist Church USA and would continue to build upon the foundation laid here. See: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/na/methodist/691-umc96apr19>

¹⁸⁸ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 114.

¹⁸⁹ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 115.

¹⁹⁰ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 115 (*Bridges in Hope*, § 3).

which they both share, an exercise with the potential to harvest “new insights into our mutual relationship and our togetherness.”¹⁹¹ The final paragraph of the statement contains these words: “A new confrontation of our common roots, of our common potential for service to humanity, with the benefits from mutual explorations, and with the knotty contemporary problems of world peace commends itself to us.”¹⁹²

9. COUNCIL OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN GERMANY

(1975)

In 1975 the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschland* (EKD) commissioned a theological study group to investigate the sociological relationship between Christians and Jews throughout the history of the Christian church. The result of the study was called *Christians and Jews*. The document offers a historical survey of how Christian-Jewish relations have unfolded throughout the centuries, particularly highlighting the way in which Christian identity in Germany and throughout Europe was formulated over and against the Jewish people. The study is primarily descriptive in nature, leaving the constructive and prescriptive work of these historical findings to subsequent studies.¹⁹³

Christians and Jews is divided into three parts: Common Roots, The Parting of the Ways, and Jews and Christians Today. The first section outlines six major areas which Christians share with Jews, starting with (1) the belief in one God. “When we Christians speak of God, we are of one mind with the Jews that the God to whom the Holy Scriptures bear witness, is One.” This shared commitment to monotheism amidst polytheistic contexts was what characterized Jews and Christians as unique, and both faiths experienced persecution for their belief in one God.¹⁹⁴ (2) Holy Scripture is another common root which Jews and Christians share. Both glean instruction from the Scriptures (the “Old” Testament) which informs their everyday life, their prayer, and their sermons and worship. Jesus and later the apostle Paul

¹⁹¹ Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 116.

¹⁹² Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 117.

¹⁹³ Rolf Rendtorff und Hans Hermann Henrix, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Dokumente von 1945-1985* (Paderborn, Germany: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1989), 558-578. Also see Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 74-82 for English excerpts. A second EKD study which built upon this one was produced in 1991 and Study III was published in 2000.

¹⁹⁴ Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 74-75.

made the “Old” Testament the basis for their proclamation and the New Testament is built upon the foundation of the “Old.” (3) A third commonality between Christians and Jews is the way that both peoples understand themselves as the “people of God.” While there are admittedly many differences regarding what this term means, “Despite their division, both [Jews and Christians] are called and ordained to be witnesses of God in this world, to do his will, and to move towards the future fulfilment of his reign.”¹⁹⁵ (4) There are common elements in the worship of Jews and Christians which are unique from all other religions. Among these are weekly holidays (Sabbath/Sunday), Scripture readings, common liturgical expression, annual celebrations such as Passover/Easter, similar conceptions of divine revelation, and aspects of synagogue worship which Christian worship appropriated and has continued to develop. Thus, “We must not overlook that existing differences were often created with the intent to separate one from the other.”¹⁹⁶ (5) Jews and Christians were both chosen by God to be partners in the covenant, and therefore share a common commitment to work for the realization of justice and love in the world and for the service of peace. (6) Jews and Christians are bound together in their relationship to history and its final *telos*. Whereas many see the course of history as fatalistic or random, Jews and Christians both “bear witness to the fact that the ultimate meaning and goal of history is God’s salvation for all men.” Thus Jews and Christians are both called to fulfill their responsibilities for God’s will in the world in mutual partnership.¹⁹⁷

10. GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH (U.S.A., 1979)¹⁹⁸

The 1979 resolution of the Episcopal Church U.S.A. entitled *Christian-Jewish Dialogue* speaks of “those spiritual ties which link the community of the New Testament to the seed of Abraham.” The resolution underscores that the Church received the “Old” Testament from the Jewish people and that the Jews “remain

¹⁹⁵ Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 77.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 78.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 80.

¹⁹⁸ The following quotations in this section are from *Christian-Jewish Dialogue* unless otherwise stated. Available at http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/protestant/Episcopal_Resolution.htm

precious to God for the sake of the patriarchs.” Thus Christians cannot forget that they are “nourished by root and sap” by the Jewish people;” nor that they both share a common hope for the day when God shall be King over all the earth. The resolution then turns its attention to antisemitism and its roots in the Holocaust: “Whereas, a denial of or an ignorance of their spiritual roots by Christians has, more often than not, provided fertile ground for the festering of antisemitism even among leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ—the Holocaust in Hitler’s Germany being only the most recent and painful memory.” The statement closes with resolutions towards a deepening commitment to Episcopal-Jewish dialogue, interfaith cooperation in local communities, and contact with Jewish scholarship in order to understand the milieu in which Jesus was nourished.

11. SYNOD OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE RHINELAND (1980)

In 1980, the provincial Synod of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland issued the statement *Towards a Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews*. The opening words signal the trajectory of the document: “It is not you who support the root, but the root that support you” (Romans 11:18b). The statement springs from the recognition that achieving a new relationship of the church to the Jewish people is a matter of “historical necessity.”¹⁹⁹ There are four factors behind this necessity: first is an admission of Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust. Second, there are new insights in Scripture that point to the enduring theological significance of the Jewish people. Third, the continuing existence of the Jews, their return to the Promised Land and the emergence of the state of Israel, are all “signs of the faithfulness of God towards his people.”²⁰⁰ Fourth, in spite of the Holocaust, Jews are ready to meet and engage with Christians in common study and cooperation.

The statement harkens back to the EKD study, *Christians and Jews*, and the Church of the Rhineland’s more in-depth *Theses on the Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews*, and reaffirms some of these theses. It declared once more co-responsibility and guilt for the part German Christendom played in the Holocaust. It confessed gratitude for the Scriptures, and emphasizes that the “Old” Testament is

¹⁹⁹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 136.

²⁰⁰ Sherman, *Bridges*, 136 (*Towards Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews*, § 2).

the common theological foundation for Jews and Christians. It confesses that Jesus was a Jew who, as the Savior of the World, binds all peoples to God. It acknowledges that the Jewish people are permanently elected as God's people; thus through Christ the church is also brought into God's covenant. This realization evokes the ground-breaking statement on missions,

We believe that in their respective calling Jews and Christians are witnesses of God before the world and before each other. Therefore, we are convinced that the church may not express its witness towards the Jewish people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world.²⁰¹

Finally, the statement acknowledges that Jews and Christians both confess God as the creator and share a common hope for justice and peace in the world.

12. EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF WEST BERLIN (1984)

In 1984, the Synod of the Evangelical Church of West Berlin issued *Points for Orientation on Christians and Jews* which sprang directly from issues raised in the 1980 Rhineland Statement. The statement begins by recognizing the significance of Christian-Jewish relations for the life and teaching of the church, and subsequently re-adopts the positions taken by the EKD in Berlin-Weissensee and at the 1960 Provincial Synod of Berlin-Brandenburg. *Points for Orientation* laments that

Our relations to the Jewish people are still overshadowed by the centuries-old attitude of enmity against the Jews in church and society, as well as by the persecution and murder of the Jews in the years 1933-45... The Holocaust remains a part of the history of our nation and of our church. Particularly in the Christian community whose members are closely linked to each other through the ages, the question of dealing with this guilt is of

²⁰¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 137. This significant statement on the permanent election of the Jewish people portends a significant turnabout in the churches' historical conception of the Jewish faith. Here, the Rhineland Synod seems to adopt a "single covenant" approach to soteriology, envisioning the church as being brought in to share in the one covenant God established with the Jewish people. In 1996, these statements were adopted as part of the constitution of the Church of the Rhineland, thereby solidifying them into the very foundation of Rhineland ecclesiology.

crucial relevance. Therefore, with our witness to the truth we oppose any denial and playing down of the Holocaust.²⁰²

The statement also speaks of the common heritage of the “Old” Testament, which is a point of mutual ground for Jews and Christians. It encourages educational endeavors so that the Jewish people can be understood properly and presented accurately on their own terms. In listening to and learning from the traditions of Judaism, Christians can begin to comprehend their own faith in a deeper and richer way. The document drafters recognize, however, that their relationship to the Jewish people is shaped by the reality that after the Holocaust, only a few small Jewish congregations exist in Germany. Thus opportunities to encounter Jews and learn about their faith are more difficult to come by. Cognizant of this heartbreaking reality, they encourage church members to be diligent in seeking out opportunities for encounters with Jews in Germany.

13. THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A.

(1987)

A lengthy paper was produced in 1987 by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A entitled *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews* which was commended to the churches for study and reflection. Its purpose was to offer teaching and guidance for the Presbyterian community particularly in their encounters with Jews. It proceeds with a keen statement on the historical context in which the churches are situated:

It is painful to realize how the teaching of the church has led individuals and groups to behavior that has tragic consequences. It is agonizing to discover that the church’s “teaching of contempt” was a major ingredient that made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews by Nazi Germany. It is disturbing to have to admit that the churches of the West did little to challenge the policies of their governments, even in the face of the growing certainty that the Holocaust was taking place.²⁰³

²⁰² Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 102 (*A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, § II.1).

²⁰³ *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews: A Paper Commended to the Church for Study and Reflection*, by the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987, pg. 13 (full paper available here: http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/_resolutions/christians-jews.pdf).

The paper calls for repentance for the Church's "long and deep complicity in the proliferation of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions" and offers an admission about the legacy of Christian antisemitism which is characterized by a frankness rarely seen within ecclesial statements:

For many centuries, it was the church's teaching to label Jews as "Christkillers" and a "deicide race." This is known as the "teaching of contempt." Persecution of Jews was at times officially sanctioned and at other times indirectly encouraged or at least tolerated...To this day, the church's worship, preaching, and teaching often lend themselves, at times unwittingly, to a perpetuation of the "teaching of contempt."...It is painful to realize how the teaching of the church has led individuals and groups to behavior that has tragic consequences. It is agonizing to discover that the church's "teaching of contempt" was a major ingredient that made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews by Nazi Germany. It is disturbing to have to admit that the churches of the West did little to challenge the policies of their governments, even in the face of the growing certainty that the Holocaust was taking place....the Holocaust is a sober reminder that such horrors are actually possible in this world and that they begin with apparently small acts of disdain or expedience.²⁰⁴

Next, the paper asserts that the church has in no way replaced the Jewish people, but rather has been engrafted into the one people of God; thus the Jews have enduring spiritual vitality and their presence is interpreted as a sign of God's abiding faithfulness. The paper evinces a depth of insight about the deleterious nature of supersessionism by describing how the denial of the spiritual existence of the Jewish people can result in their physical elimination. It establishes that the theory of supersessionism is destructive by nature, and the churches are challenged to jettison this notion, and replace it with the concept of being engrafted into the one people of God.

In light of Judaism's ongoing spiritual vitality, dialogue rather than proselytism, is the appropriate means of authentic conversation. "Dialogue is not a

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 12. For other noteworthy statements issued by the Presbyterian Church see the 2010 paper *Christians and Jews: People of God* which is a supplemental paper to the 1987 "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews. Also, the *Statement of The Presbyterian Church in Canada on our Relationship with the Jewish People* issued June, 2011 and *Breaking Down Walls* a 172-page report of the Middle East Study Committee (MESC) issued in 2010.

cover for proselytism,²⁰⁵ rather it is described as both “partners are able to define their faith in their own terms avoiding caricatures of one another.”²⁰⁶

14. ANGLICAN LAMBETH CONFERENCE

(1988)

The Lambeth Conference, representing the worldwide Anglican community of about 70 million adherents, meets every ten years to discuss contemporary issues of concern for its member churches. The 1988 meeting specifically addressed Christian-Jewish dialogue for the first time in Anglican history and issued several statements addressing the relationship between Christians and Jews. The document *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* broadens the standard conception of Christian-Jewish dialogue by critically reflecting on interfaith dialogue among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, arguing that all three religions share a special relationship as Abrahamic faiths.²⁰⁷

The document makes a number of positive affirmations about the Jewish people. For example, the unique bond which Christians share with Jews is emphasized saying,

For Christians, Judaism can never be one religion among others. It has a special bond and affinity with Christianity. Jesus, our Lord and the Christ, was a Jew, and the Scriptures which informed and guided his life were the books of the Hebrew Bible. These still form part of the Christian Scriptures. The God in whom Jesus believed, to whom he totally gave himself, and in whom we believe is ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’. A right understanding of the relationship with Judaism is, therefore, fundamental to Christianity’s own self-understanding.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, § 12.

²⁰⁶ *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, § 12.

²⁰⁷ Other statements stemming from the 1988 Lambeth Conference include the *Resolution V.20 on the Holy Land* available at: <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-5-20.cfm> and *Resolution 24 on Palestine and Israel* available at <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-24.cfm>. The full text of *Jews, Christians and Muslims: the Way of Dialogue* is available at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/the-holy-land/info/lambeth1.cfm>. Two other significant Anglican documents on Jewish-Christian relations are the 1994 *Christians and Jews: A New Way of Thinking* which was the product of a Jewish and Christian joint working group and the 2001 *Sharing One Hope?* by the Interfaith Consultative Group of the Church of England.

²⁰⁸ *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, § 13.

Point sixteen of the document begins by saying “We firmly reject any view of Judaism which sees it as a living fossil, simply superseded by Christianity.” The statement goes on to affirm the continued existence of the Jewish people and the irrevocability of God’s gifts saying, “God continues to fulfil his purposes among the Jewish people.” Pointing to conceptions of election in Romans 9-11, the statement declares that “God’s choice stands and they [the Jews] are his friends for the sake of the patriarchs.”²⁰⁹

The document also laments the church’s long legacy of the teaching of contempt and confesses that the dissemination of anti-Jewish teachings on the part of Christianity’s leaders and preachers has led to caricatured and distorted views of Judaism. This denigration has fostered persecution towards the Jewish people and ultimately “provided the soil in which the evil weed of Nazism was able to take root and spread its poison.” In a manner similar to the Vatican’s *We Remember*, the document underscores that the Nazis were driven by a pagan philosophy, whose ultimate desideratum was the obliteration of Christianity itself. After this assertion, the question is posed of how this pagan philosophy was able to take root. While leaving this question unanswered it states,

The systematic extermination of six million Jews and the wiping out of a whole culture must bring about in Christianity a profound and painful re-examination of its relationship with Judaism. In order to combat centuries of anti-Jewish teaching and practice, Christians must develop programmes of teaching, preaching, and common social action which eradicate prejudice and promote dialogue.²¹⁰

The final section entitled “The Way of Sharing” envisions dialogue as “mutual sharing,” explaining that “Dialogue does not require people to relinquish or alter their beliefs before entering into it; on the contrary, genuine dialogue demands that each partner brings to it the fullness of themselves and the tradition in which they stand.”²¹¹ After describing the diversity of approaches and attitudes towards Judaism evident within the churches today, the statement hones in on some common ground that these perspectives share. Each has “a common concern to be sensitive to

²⁰⁹ *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, §16.

²¹⁰ *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, § 17.

²¹¹ *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, § 25.

Judaism, to reject all proselytising, that is, aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert, and, of course, any hint of antisemitism.”²¹² The document describes the common mission which Jews, Christians, and Muslims all share, that of hallowing God’s name in the world and of loving God and one’s neighbor as themselves. This task is conceived of as “mutual witness to God between equal partners.”²¹³

15. THE ALLIANCE OF BAPTISTS

(1995)

Within the Baptist denomination, the Alliance of Baptists issued a 1995 *Statement on Baptist-Jewish Relations* which clearly expressed the need for contrition for, among other things, “inaction to the horrors of the Holocaust.”²¹⁴ After recalling that *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent declarations heralded a significant metamorphosis in Jewish-Christian relations, the statement confessed that “the Holocaust did not occur overnight or within the span of a few years, but were the culmination of centuries of Christian teaching and church-sanctioned action directed against the Jews simply because they were Jews.” This statement shows a keen understanding and unbridled candor seldom seen within ecclesial statements. It is worth quoting at length:

As Baptist Christians we are the inheritors of and, in our turn, have been the transmitters of a theology which lays the blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews; a theology which has taken the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian Scriptures out of its first century context and has made it normative for Christian-Jewish relations; a theology which has usurped for the Church the biblical promises and prerogatives given by God to the Jews; a theology which ignores nineteen centuries of Jewish development by viewing contemporary Jews as modern versions of their first century co-religionists; a theology which views the Jewish people and Jewish nationhood merely as pieces in an eschatological chess game; a theology which has valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and prejudice over knowledge; a theology which does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and efficacy of the Jewish faith.

²¹² *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, § 27.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ The following quotations in this section are from the statement produced from The Alliance of Baptists (1995), unless otherwise stated. Full text is available here: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/na/baptist/697-ab95mar4>.

The next section moves to a public confession of sins against the Jewish people, offered with the hope for reconciliation; first for the sin of complicity and the sin of silence; confession for interpreting sacred writings in ways deleterious to the Jewish people; and confession for “indifference and inaction to the horrors of the Holocaust.”

Building on the reconciling work of those who have gone before, the statement calls upon all Baptists to join in the following resolutions: (1) affirming that God has not rejected his covenant people,²¹⁵ (2) eschewing exegetical interpretations of Scripture which spawn stereotypes and prejudice against Jews and Judaism, (3) searching for opportunities for authentic dialogue with the Jewish community, (4) raising our voices “quickly and boldly against all expression of anti-Semitism,” and (5) educating ourselves and others about the history of Jewish-Christians relations from the first century until today so the past can illuminate the present.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ In stark contrast, just one year later in 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention, representing the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S, issued a resolution to continue to evangelize the Jewish people. This statement has evoked great concern for those involved in the task of redefining the Jewish-Christian relationship. The statement reads: “Whereas Jesus commanded that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:47); and Whereas, Our evangelistic efforts have largely neglected the Jewish people, both at home and abroad; and Whereas, We are indebted to the Jewish people, through whom we have received the Scriptures and our Savior, the Messiah of Israel, and “they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (Rom. 11:28, b); and Whereas There has been an organized effort on the part of some either to deny that Jewish people need to come to their Messiah, Jesus, to be saved; or to claim, for whatever reason, that Christians have neither right nor obligation to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people; and Whereas, There is evidence of a growing responsiveness among the Jewish people in some areas of our nation and our world; now, therefore, Be it resolved That we, the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 11-13, 1996, reaffirm that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1 :16); and Be it further resolved That we recommit ourselves to prayer, especially for the salvation of the Jewish people as well as for the salvation of “every kindred and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9; and Be it finally resolved, That we direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people. See The Southern Baptist Convention’s, “Resolution on Jewish Evangelism,” available at: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=655>.

²¹⁶ The Alliance of Baptists, meeting in convocation again on April 25, 2003 at Vienna, VA, issued *A Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations*, in essence readopting these 1995 affirmations and adding a noteworthy mandate that the document’s resolutions be carried out both institutionally and by individual members and churches. See <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/na/baptist/710-ab03apr25>.

16. THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF BAVARIA

(1998)

The statement *Christians and Jews* was promulgated by the Lutheran Church of Bavaria in 1998. The first section summarizes five areas of consensus reached within the Protestant church in the realm of Jewish-Christian relations. First is the oft-repeated notion that Jews and Christians share common roots. The document isolates a significant cause for the “frightful persecutions and murders of Jewish persons” saying that these things which Jews and Christians hold in common “have through the centuries been forgotten and denied by Christians and misapplied and misinterpreted.”²¹⁷ For this reason, too, there came about the rightful persecutions and murders of Jewish persons, in which Christians participated, which were initiated by Christians or tolerated by Christians.

A second area of consensus is that the Holocaust represents a “deep challenge to Christian teaching and practice.”²¹⁸ Thus, reconciliation between Jews and Christians must start with an awareness of Christian complicity in the Holocaust. Thirdly, the document recounts the heritage of Luther’s antisemitism and admonishes the churches to “take seriously also his anti-Jewish utterances, to acknowledge their theological function, and to reflect on their consequences.”²¹⁹ Fourth, is consensus that the Jewish people are still God’s elect people, their chosenness remains fixed, in spite of the election of the church. “The Christian faith

²¹⁷ *Christians and Jews*, § I.1. Complete statement is available at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/719-lcb98nov24>.

²¹⁸ *Christians and Jews*, § I.2.

²¹⁹ *Christians and Jews*, § I.3. Two similar documents issued within the Lutheran denomination are: (1) The 1983 statement *Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews* issued in Stockholm by the Lutheran World Federation in conjunction with the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. Here, the Lutheran participants deplored and rejected Martin Luther’s invectives against the Jews and declared that “The sins of Luther’s anti-Jewish remarks...the violence of his attacks on the Jews, must be acknowledged with deep distress. And all occasions for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches.” See <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/interreligious/759-lwfjic1983>. (2) In 1994 the *Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community* was adopted by the ELCA. The single page document conveyed grief, particularly regarding the baleful legacy of Martin Luther, and tragedies such as the Holocaust, which transpired in places strongly represented by Lutherans. The document acknowledged the venomous vituperations against the Jews which are found within Luther’s later writings. Recognizing that all antisemitism is an affront to the Gospel, the ELCA pledged to oppose in the future “the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and the society around us.” Full text found in Frank E. Eakin, *What Price Prejudice?: Christian Antisemitism in America* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 162-163. For a nuanced reading of Luther and his legacy see Claire Huchet-Bishop, ‘Response to John Pawlikowski’, in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, Fleischner, ed. (New York: Ktav, 1977), 179–190.

holds fast to the unrevoked election of Israel.”²²⁰ A final area of consensus revolves around the duty to contend against all manifestations of antisemitism, as “in opposition to the deepest essence of the Christian faith.”²²¹ Christians are summoned to cultivate a relationship with Jews and Judaism characterized by respect, openness and dialogue.

17. THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN AUSTRIA (1998)

The General Synod of the Protestant Church, Augsburg, and Helvetian Confession adopted the declaration *Time to Turn* (Zeit zur Umkehr). The statement was issued in November 1998, just days before the 60th anniversary of the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom against the Jews. It begins,

This event prompts us Protestant Christians and churches in Austria to again grapple with this century’s dreadful history of the deliberate attempt to annihilate the Europe’s Jews. The part played by Christians and churches and their shared responsibility for the suffering and misery of Jews can no longer be denied.²²²

The subsequent line concedes, “We realize with shame that our churches showed themselves inured by the fate of the Jews and countless other victims of persecution.”²²³ Here we see one of the few ecclesial documents that explicitly mention, however tersely, the fate of non-Jewish victims. The statement continues with the confession that not only individual Christians but also the churches share in the guilt of the Holocaust.²²⁴ In light of these individual and ecclesial failures, the following assurances are made: to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust, to purge teachings, sermons, liturgies and practices within the church of all vestiges of

²²⁰ *Christians and Jews*, § I.4.

²²¹ *Christians and Jews*, § I.5.

²²² The General Synod of the Protestant Church, Augsburg and Helvetian Confession, *Time to Turn*, 1998. Full text at: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/720-eva98nov>

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ *Time to Turn*, § II.

antisemitism; and to combat prejudice whenever and wherever it might be encountered.²²⁵

The final sections accentuate the permanent election of Israel as the people of God and echo the words of the 1996 resolution of the Ecumenical Assembly in Erfurt—that Judaism must be envisaged as “a living and diverse entity that existed already before Christianity and simultaneously with it.”²²⁶ This statement regarding missions seems to resonate the Bristol Report three decades earlier: “Because the covenant of God with his people Israel exists in nothing but grace to the end of time, mission among Jews is theologically not justifiable and to be rejected as a church program.”²²⁷

18. LEUENBERG CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

(2001)

The study *Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews* was published in 2001. Issued by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, a community of Protestant churches from the Reformation tradition throughout Europe, it is one of the most scholarly and extensive documents to date on Jewish-Christian relations. The goal of the document is to cultivate common understanding within the Reformation churches concerning the theme “Church and Israel” and to clarify the contemporary relationship with the Jewish faith for their ecclesial communities. The study begins by conveying that the relationship between the Church and Israel

Is not a marginal question for the Church or for Christian theology. On the contrary, it concerns a central element of Reformation ecclesiology which is derived from the action of God. The foundation of the Church’s faith makes it dependent on Israel and therefore its relation to Israel is “an indispensable part of the foundation of [its] faith”²²⁸

²²⁵ *Time to Turn*, § III.

²²⁶ *Time to Turn*, § IV and V.

²²⁷ The statement continues, “The dialog of Christians with Judaism, in which they are rooted, is to be fundamentally distinguished from a dialog of Christians with other religions.” *Time to Turn*, § V.

²²⁸ See *Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews* (2001), 1.3. Full text available at: <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1009>.

Four basic premises are listed in the introduction which constitute the guidelines for the project: (1) the inseparable connection between the election of the church and that of Israel; (2) the Church's relationship to Israel is inextricably connected with the foundation of their faith; (3) the realization that in encountering the Jewish faith, Christians will find both points of similarity and divergence; (4) and the assertion that "lively dialogue" among Jews and Christians entails that both parties share the truth of their faith and listen in order to glean understanding.²²⁹

The document is divided into three parts. Part I outlines the historical and theological presuppositions under which the signatory churches are working, describes historical encounters with the Jewish people within the Reformation churches of Europe, and critically reflects on the biblical foundations and historical development of the churches' relationship with the Jewish people. This section offers a statement pinpointing the cause of the churches' failure during the Holocaust:

The churches look back on times of persecution of the Jews and especially on the Shoah, which exceeded all previous persecution in its programmatic brutality and intensity. The churches know that they failed in that situation... The churches failed because of indifference and fear, pride and weakness; but they also failed, above all, as a consequence of wrong interpretations of texts from the Bible and the terrible theological errors to which they led. Sometimes in Christianity there has been an idea that the rejection and devaluation of Judaism, even to the extent of overt anti-Semitism, could be considered an important aspect of how Christians understand themselves.²³⁰

The statement goes on to describe the enduring effect the Holocaust has had on both Jews and Christians, noting that even still today the life of Judaism is deeply shaped by the memory of the Holocaust. Thus, it is a "lasting challenge to the churches and their theology." The statement beckons all the churches in Europe to grapple with this challenge, even those who did not directly participate in Holocaust atrocities:

The Shoah continues to demand permanent theological self-examination and renewal; it compels us to investigate the causes of the hatred of Jews which repeatedly breaks out anew and of the anti-Semitism which is still

²²⁹ See *Church and Israel*, Introduction.

²³⁰ See *Church and Israel*, I.1.1.

found even today. This self-examination must demonstrate willingness and readiness for penitence and conversion.²³¹

Part II discusses theological definitions particularly relating to how the churches understand their own self-conception in relation to Judaism. It considers areas of diversity such as distinctive covenantal frameworks and the debate about the meaning of the phrase “people of God.” It reminds the churches that these endeavors at self-conception and understanding are “stages in an unfinished process of theological reasoning” and that they must judge these matters based on whether they do justice to the biblical notions of God’s election of Israel and God’s election of the Church in Jesus Christ.²³²

Part III outlines some consequences for the practices of the churches, highlighting the realms of parish work and church leadership, preaching and teaching, worship and the festival calendar, and church education. In parish work, churches are encouraged in each specific context such as religious education, confirmation preparation, or study groups “to convey the special relationship which links Christians with Jews.”²³³ When preaching and teaching, Christians must recognize that Jews worship and witness to the one God whom they also confess as Creator and Lord. “Hence, the church’s proclamation in preaching and teaching can find room for what Jews and Christians have in common and what unites them.”²³⁴

In reference to worship and celebration, “the Church witnesses to its link with Israel through faith in the One God who created the one humankind.” Thus the paper recommends that attention is drawn to numerous aspects of similarity between Christian and Jewish worship (e.g. reading Psalms, annual festivals, the Last Supper/Passover meal) so Christians can better appreciate elements of their faith tradition which originate in Judaism and exist as living links to the Jewish faith.²³⁵ Finally, concerning education, reflection upon the nexus between the Church and the Jewish people should have ramifications upon Christian instruction and training—particularly regarding an understanding of the Jewish interpretation of scripture, the

²³¹ See *Church and Israel*, I.1.4.

²³² See *Church and Israel*, II.1.5.

²³³ See *Church and Israel*, III.1.1.4.

²³⁴ See *Church and Israel*, III.1.2.1.

²³⁵ See *Church and Israel*, III.1.3.1, 1.3.2, 1.3.5.

practice of Judaism, and the inherent connection between the Church and the Jewish people.²³⁶

The concluding remarks of the Leuenberg Fellowship statement acknowledge once more the churches' responsibility and guilt before the Jewish people in light of centuries of hatred towards the Jews. It closes with these words:

The churches recognise their false interpretations of biblical statements and traditions; they confess their guilt before God and humanity and ask God for forgiveness. They hold fast to the hope that God's Spirit will lead and accompany them on new paths.²³⁷

19. UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

(2003)

In 2003 the General Council of the United Church of Canada issued the document *Bearing Faithful Witness: Statement on United Church-Jewish Relations Today*. The statement is organized around a series of acknowledgments, rejections, affirmations, and exhortations.

The statement acknowledges that there is a legacy of anti-Judaism and antisemitism within Christianity as a whole, including within the United Church of Canada.²³⁸ It acknowledges that New Testament texts have often been erroneously

²³⁶ See *Church and Israel*, III.1.4.

²³⁷ See *Church and Israel*, III, concluding remarks.

²³⁸ In 1997, a much more extensive paper by the same name was produced by the Council of the United Church of Canada task group. The paper begins by isolating a long list of misconceptions that are swirling around in the churches, offering an insightful look into the amount of practical work that still remains to be done in the arena of Jewish-Christian relations. The paper opens with the rhetorical question, "Why this paper?" And responds "Because many of us grew up thinking that Jesus had invented the Last Supper; Because in our churches Jesus is rarely referred to as a Jew; Because there is rising anti-Judaism, antisemitism, white supremacy and neo-Nazism in Canada and other countries in the name of Jesus Christ; Because we are finally understanding that Christian denial of Jesus' Jewishness contributed to pogroms, the Holocaust, the refusal to admit refugees and other horrors against Jewish people; Because a Jewish friend visiting in our churches could feel attacked by some of our Scriptures and interpretation of them; Because there is little general knowledge of the context in which the Scriptures were written and edited, and Bible study is not a priority for most United Church adults; Because our language and interpretation of Scripture has not kept pace with our evolving faith; Because there is little reaction from the Christian community when synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are desecrated; Because there is a growing interest in exploring other faith traditions, and Christianity has a special relationship with Judaism; Because many of us make the erroneous assumption that, having read the Bible, we know much about Judaism, both historical and contemporary." Full text at: <http://www.jcrelations.net/Bearing+Faithful+Witness%27+Part+1.2230.0.html?L=3>.

interpreted, leading to antisemitic readings and that Christians have often been insensitive regarding the importance of the Holocaust for the Jewish people. Antisemitism and anti-Judaism are decried as “affronts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²³⁹ Next, the teaching of contempt is rejected, along with the notion that God has abrogated the covenant with the Jewish people or that Christians have replaced the Jews. The practice of targeting Jews as converts to the Christian faith is also rejected. Affirmations include that Judaism has significance as a religion, a people, and a covenant community; God’s gifts and call to the Jewish are irrevocable; Judaism and Christianity have a unique relationship and both stem from a common root; God’s love is made manifest in both Torah and Gospel; and Israel has the right to exist in peace and security. Members and congregations are exhorted to pursue opportunities to meet with Jews and to learn about modern Judaism; to be mindful of the need to struggle against antisemitism and anti-Judaism; and to cultivate opportunities within the liturgy which emphasize the Jewish-Christian relationship.

20. CONCLUSION

As evinced here, the official statements of the mainline Protestant churches reflect the radical metamorphosis in the churches’ approach to Judaism and the Jewish people in the last seventy years. These statements evolve from tentative theological first steps to more recent and forthcoming proposals which recognize the validity of Judaism’s covenant with God, eschew the traditional concept of missions toward the Jewish people,²⁴⁰ and call for a renewed commitment to the Jewish roots of Christianity.

²³⁹ *Bearing Faithful Witness*, § a. See full text at: <http://www.ccejr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/na/united-church/692-ucca03aug>.

²⁴⁰ Perhaps one of the most potent repudiations of Christian missionary efforts toward Jews was produced by the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Hamburg. In 1995 this organization issued a call to the churches called *Renunciation of ‘Mission to the Jews’*. This document cited several examples both in ecclesial publications and church activities where mission to the Jews was occurring and lamented the fact that it was still taking place. It stated: “The hesitation and ambiguity expressed in church statements is an extraordinary burden to the Christian- Jewish partnership. The meeting of Jews and Christians can only continue to be trusting and fruitful if every intention--however concealed--to missionize Jews is completely rejected.” The statement declares that while churches are making a great effort in opposing antisemitism, these efforts are “open to suspicion if some groups and representatives in the churches refuse, openly or in a veiled manner, a renunciation of mission to Jews. Jews experience [Christian] mission to Jews as a brusque threat to their existence. That is only too understandable after the experiences of the last centuries and especially the Shoah. Only if the

E. Post-Holocaust Ecclesial Statements Conclusion

This brief survey reveals that the churches are undergoing a reconceptualization of a number of fundamental aspects of Christian doctrine and practice which prior to the Holocaust had remained largely unnoticed and virtually unchallenged. Many of these church documents are so revolutionary that Clark Williamson calls them “new epistles to the churches,” arguing that these statements can serve as beacons to guide the churches to redefine defective aspects of Christian tradition.²⁴¹ One of the most obvious trends here is a proliferation of ecclesial statements confessing contrition for the Church’s perennial teaching of contempt towards the Jewish people and repudiating the malady of antisemitism as incompatible with the Christian faith. Allan Brockway says of this trajectory: “Although many in the churches rejected antisemitism prior to the Shoah, after it such rejection became the single most unambiguous element in statements about Jews and Judaism.”²⁴²

Many of these churches have come to see their responsibility toward the Jewish people in terms of dialogue, aimed at gaining mutual understanding rather than in terms of missionary conversion.²⁴³ While there are still many practical

churches clearly refuse to missionize Jews, is their fight against *anti-Judaismus* within the church and against every form of antisemitism in society really plausible.”

²⁴¹ Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology*, (Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, K.Y., 1993), 32.

²⁴² Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 184.

²⁴³ One of the most resolute rejoinders in response to a cessation of mission to the Jews was the *Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People*. Drafted in 1989 by a group of 15 evangelical scholars (including J.I. Packer, David Wells and Vernon Grounds), it was commissioned under the sponsorship of the World Evangelical Fellowship to deal specifically with the issue of Christian evangelization to the Jewish people. In the preamble *Willowbank* says, “This declaration is made in response to growing doubts and widespread confusion among Christians about the need for, and the propriety of, endeavors to share faith in Jesus Christ with the Jewish people.” The drafters of *Willowbank* condemn those who have “retreated from embracing the task of evangelizing Jews” While they say that they pledge themselves to staunchly resist all forms of antisemitism and establish that the Jewish people have an ongoing part in God’s plan, they go on to affirm that “the supreme way of showing love to the Jewish people is by encouraging them to receive God’s gift of life through Jesus the Messiah.” The document avers that sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with lost humanity is “a matter of prime obligation” for Christians because Christ commands us to make disciples and “because love of neighbor requires effort to meet our neighbor’s deepest need.” Article IV.23 emphatically proclaims “We affirm that it is unchristian, unloving, and discriminatory, to propose a moratorium on the evangelizing of any part of the human race, and that failure to preach the gospel to the Jewish people would be a form of anti-Semitism, depriving this particular community of its right to hear the Gospel.” The document continues “We deny that we have sufficient warrant to assume or anticipate the salvation of anyone, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.” The drafters of *Willowbank* takes issue with numerous affirmations purported by the previous authors and church statements such as that “covenantal privilege alone can ever bring salvation to impenitent believers”, that “modern Judaism with its explicit negation of the divine person, work and Messiahship of Jesus Christ contains within itself true knowledge of God’s salvation” and that “the historical

implications to be further explicated, particularly as they pertain to each church's unique historical context, these statements serve as significant touchstones for the direction the churches are moving in confessing their faith in relation to the Jewish people. Marcus Braybrooke says, "The churches have in large measure relearned their picture of Judaism. They have yet to grasp the theological implications of this for their own self-understanding."²⁴⁴

I will briefly highlight three patterns for investigation which are visible within these church statements and which will be analyzed in more detail in the forthcoming chapter. The first pertains to the churches' conception of antisemitism. In spite of some evasive tendencies, particularly in earlier statements, a number of statements here confess a deep understanding of the churches' guilt and co-responsibility for their role under the Third Reich. These statements of remorse have been issued not only by the German churches but also by non-German churches, who also see themselves as bearing some measure of responsibility for fostering an enduring legacy of antisemitism. To return to but one example indicative of this pattern: the United Methodist Church declared in 1972 that Christians "are obliged to examine their own implicit and explicit responsibility for the discrimination against and for organized extermination of Jews, as in the recent past."²⁴⁵

Within these statements, antisemitism is conceived as *the* primary factor that militated against the churches taking a stronger ethical stance on behalf of victims of the Nazi regime. While many Christians in the decades since the Holocaust have envisioned that the attempt to annihilate European Jewry was a distinctly German and/or secular event, Jules Isaac offered a different perspective which encapsulates the dominant understanding within these documents.

The German responsibility for these crimes, as overwhelming as it has been, is only a derivative responsibility, grafted like a most hideous parasite on a centuries-old tradition which is a Christian tradition... anti-Semitism exists

status of Jews as God's people brings salvation to any Jew who does not accept the claims of Jesus Christ." See the complete document at: <http://lcje.net/willowbank.html>

²⁴⁴ Marcus Braybrooke, *Time to Meet: Towards a Deeper Relationship Between Jews and Christians* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 39.

²⁴⁵ http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/protestant/UMC1972.htm.

everywhere, and...the perennial source of this latent anti-Semitism is none other than Christian religious teaching in all its forms.²⁴⁶

In these statements, Christian culpability in the Holocaust is almost always attributed to the church's legacy of antisemitism (i.e. the teaching of contempt). Thus, "The Shoah reveals with absolute clarity what happens when the malignancy of antisemitism spreads and goes untreated."²⁴⁷ In other words, the primary answer given to the oft-asked question, *What went wrong with the churches during the Holocaust*, is that they failed to respond on behalf of Jewish victims because of their animosity towards the Jews (or at least because they forgot the common bond which they shared with the Jewish people). For example, "Teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism in certain Christian traditions proved a spawning ground for the evil of the Nazi Holocaust."²⁴⁸ The document *Christians and Jews: A Manifesto 50 Years after the Weissensee Declaration* which was issued in 2000 says,

It is not only through 'omission and silence' that the church has become guilty. It is rather through the disastrous tradition of estrangement from the Jews and enmity towards them that it has been implicated in the systematic destruction of European Jewry. It is the theological tradition that since 1945 has burdened and delayed all endeavors towards a new approach in the church's relations to the Jewish people.²⁴⁹

A similar connection is made by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, which claims that the history of persecution and hatred towards the Jewish people "shows that there were fundamental deficits in theological reflection on Judaism and on the special relation between the Church and Israel." These shortcomings are seen as "a major contribution to the lack of effective resistance in many Reformation churches to the crimes of National Socialism."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 400.

²⁴⁷ See *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 250.

²⁴⁸ *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, World Council of Churches, 1982 (3.2)

²⁴⁹ http://www.jcrelations.net/Christians_and_Jews__A_Manifesto_50_Years_after_the_Weissensee_Declaration.1310.0.html?searchText=Israel&page=2.

²⁵⁰ See Leuenberg Church Fellowship, *Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews* (2001), § I. 4.9. See <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1009>.

The cure that is put forth to excise the cancer of antisemitism is a renewed emphasis on the commonalities which Christians have long shared with Jews. Antisemitism, which militated against a stronger ethical response on behalf of victims of Nazism, can and must be eradicated through re-solidifying the common bond which links Christians with Jews. Nearly every document surveyed states this implicitly or explicitly through robust expressions of solidarity, accentuation of common roots, and reiterating the closeness between Christians and Jews.

Thus the Holocaust functions as a guidepost beckoning the churches to remember the inviolable oneness they share with the Jewish faith. Not only should antisemitism be eradicated because of Christianity's common origins and mutual spiritual characteristics, but because Christians need Jews *for their very spiritual survival*. Within these documents, antisemitism is typically repudiated *on the grounds* of Christianity's close connection with Judaism and the Jewish people. Because Christianity is dependent upon the Jews as their "spiritual roots" and "beloved elder brother," antisemitism is understood as a form of "spiritual suicide"²⁵¹ and "a sin against God and man."²⁵²

A second pattern discernable here is a pervasive tendency within these documents to ascribe Jews a functional, mythical-religious status in the Christian drama of redemption, albeit a much more "positive" status than before. While many of these documents speak powerfully of the need to understand Jews and their religion on their own terms so that Jews are able to finally recognize themselves in the way that Christians describe them, Jews are still envisioned predominantly through the lens of Christian theology.²⁵³ These church statements highlight, as Stephen Haynes points out, that those inundated in the Christian tradition have extreme difficulty viewing Jews as normal human beings like themselves.²⁵⁴ Within these statements, Jews and Judaism are primarily understood in homogenous, monolithic terms (e.g. "The Jewish perspective" or "The Jewish understanding of Scripture") which ignores the multiplicity of Judaism and risks creating new

²⁵¹ Sherman, *Bridges*, 56.

²⁵² *First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Amsterdam, 1948.

²⁵³ In fact, many of working with the genre of post-Holocaust theology actually understand the task they are undergoing as articulating a "Christian theology of Judaism." See for example, Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism*, (Paulist Press, 1980) which focuses on the place of Judaism within a true Christian self-understanding.

²⁵⁴ Stephen Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination*, 5.

stereotypes of Jews. As chapter III will elaborate, this tendency is highly problematic when examined through the lens of otherness.

A final pattern, or rather omission, which is observed within these statements is that very little is said about non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, particularly regarding the question of why the churches also did not stand up for others who were deemed to be “unfortunate expendables” within the Nazi regime. In diagnosing antisemitism as the primary reason behind churches failure to react to Nazi atrocities, Christians have, by and large, evaded a more extensive critique of the church’s ethical stance towards the destruction of the Other in the Third Reich. None of these statements has grappled to any real extent with the problematic question of why the churches were also silent toward the persecution of Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the mentally and physically impaired, homosexuals, Communists, and political opponents of the Nazi regime.

While much more could be said about the patterns discerned here, we will first segue to a brief exploration of Holocaust theology and its theologians in order to hear from some of the most radical voices on the post-Holocaust landscape.

II. SUMMARY OF HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY AND ITS THEOLOGIANS

This section will introduce the genre known as Holocaust theology, highlight its aims and its deconstructive nature, and briefly discuss the contributions this movement has made toward a profound reformation of Christian theology in light of the Holocaust. Significantly less time and attention is devoted to so-called Holocaust theologians than to ecclesial statements since the overarching purpose of this work is to ascertain how the *churches* understand their role during the Holocaust and have endeavored to reform their theology and practice in this light. Those working within the genre of Holocaust theology represent the most radical Christian scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations and therefore, their influence has been minimal on the churches. The revisional work of the vast majority of these scholars do not represent the voices of the churches in any official capacity, but their work does evince some of the same problematic tendencies which were outlined in the previous section.

A. Introduction to Holocaust Theology

The crisis of the Holocaust has revealed the necessity for radical changes in Christianity's self-understanding in areas such as biblical hermeneutics, soteriology, Christology, and missiology. The literature that has emerged after the Holocaust understands itself as creating new theological space for an extensive, internal critique and re-conceptualization of Christian theology and praxis.

The label "Holocaust theologian" denotes scholars who view the Holocaust, particularly Nazi atrocities against the Jewish people, as a profound moral crisis for the Christian faith; a calamity that necessitates a deep-seated reformation of Christian theology. The genre gained momentum in the late 1960s and became increasingly influential in the 1970s. Christian Holocaust theologians represent a relatively small group of scholars, primarily from North America and Europe, and mainly from liberal Protestant and Roman Catholic backgrounds. Some of the movements founding figures are A. Roy and Alice Eckardt, Franklin H. Littell, Rosemary R. Ruether, Eva Fleischner, John Pawlikowski, Gregory Baum, Hubert G. Locke, James Parkes, Henry James Cargas, Paul Van Buren, and more recently Eugene Fisher, Darrell Fasching, and John K. Roth.

Stephen Haynes defines the genre of Holocaust theology as "Any sustained theological reflection for which the slaughter of six million Jews functions as a criterion, whether the Shoah displaces or merely qualifies traditional theological criteria and norms such as Scripture, tradition, reason and religious experience."²⁵⁵ It is important to note that the term Holocaust theology does not necessarily denote that the event of the Holocaust itself is always the explicit topic of this theological reflection; instead the Holocaust is the shadow which cast darkness on all other aspects of Christian thought and practice and necessitates an extensive critique of problematic aspects within Christian history and theology. Protestant theologian Paul van Buren has written prolifically on Jewish-Christian relations.²⁵⁶ His

²⁵⁵ Stephen R. Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology: a Critical Reassessment," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 62:2 (1994): 554. Haynes is careful to point out that none of the theologians within this genre actually use the term Holocaust theologians to define themselves, this is simply a term of convenience. A few of these theologians, in fact, reject the term (e.g. Paul Van Buren has protested the use of the term to describe his own theology, commenting that he is concerned primarily with living, not dead Jews).

²⁵⁶ See Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality*, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury Press, 1980-88).

statement portrays the way in which many Holocaust theologians envision the Holocaust as the crux of their theological reflection:

One thing is certain: After Auschwitz, nothing in our hearts or our theology, if we would be disciples of our Lord Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth, can be as it was before, any word or act that we Gentiles do that separates us from the least of his Jewish brothers and sisters stands under the judgment of Auschwitz, and therefore under the judgment of the cross.²⁵⁷

We will now turn to explore some of the primary contentions being made within the genre of Holocaust theology; these claims comprise a manifesto of sorts, for Holocaust theologians.

B. Key Contentions of Holocaust Theologians²⁵⁸

1. THE HOLOCAUST MUST BE SEEN AS *SUI GENERIS*

One of the most striking characteristics of Holocaust theology is that the historical event of the Holocaust is seen as *sui generis* on the plane of human history. The Holocaust, like nothing ever before, accentuates the church's horrific treatment of the Jews for nearly two millennia and is conceived of as a watershed event, not only for human history, but especially for the Christian faith. The church's legacy of Jew-hatred culminating in the Holocaust is understood as "an indisputable sign of the church's apostasy from authentic Christianity."²⁵⁹ Franklin H. Littell agrees that the Holocaust is and will remain "the major event in recent church history...because it called into question the whole fabric of Christendom."²⁶⁰ Alice Eckardt calls the Holocaust "the terminus of the previous Christian age,"²⁶¹ arguing along with Roy Eckardt that the Holocaust creates two groups of people—those who take the Holocaust with absolute seriousness and those who do not. For the Eckardts, history is indelibly ruptured into two historical eras—"B.F.S.", before the Final Solution—

²⁵⁷ Van Buren, "Judaism in Christian Theology" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 18:1 (1981), 127.

²⁵⁸ I am indebted to Stephen Haynes for pointing out a number of these characteristics in *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1991), especially pgs. 6-7.

²⁵⁹ Stephen R. Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology," 555.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey Into Day* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1988), 100.

²⁶¹ Alice L. Eckardt, "The Shoah-Road to a Revised/Revived Christianity" in *From the Unthinkable to the Unavoidable*, 146.

and “F.S.”, in the year of the Final Solution.²⁶² Likewise, Michael McGarry describes the Holocaust as “a radically re-orienting event for both Christian and Jews; it has become the overarching reference point for personal and theological self-understanding.”²⁶³

It is not uncommon for Holocaust theologians to imbue the Holocaust with a revelatory quality.²⁶⁴ For Paul van Buren, the Holocaust may be seen as revelatory not because it was inherently unique among historical events but because it has led to a radical reinterpretation of Christian tradition. He claims that,

The pattern of revelation which shaped the Scriptures and the church’s beginning has once again reasserted itself. Events in Jewish history, perhaps the most staggering and unexpected events in its history since the church split off from the Jewish people, have worked a reorientation in the mind of many responsible Christians which has led to that new interpretation of the tradition of which we have spoken. If there follows eventually a reorientation of the community of the church, then it will be appropriate to speak of these events as revelatory.²⁶⁵

A similar claim is made by Gregory Baum: “The Holocaust is an altogether singular manifestation of evil, with proportions beyond imagination, revealing the demonic possibilities of our civilization. In this sense, the Awful Event is revelatory. It makes known the hidden.”²⁶⁶ For Holocaust theologians, the atrocities of the Holocaust are not simply one example of “man’s inhumanity to man” but function as a primary source, a lodestar, for theological reflection.²⁶⁷ These statements reflect how the

²⁶² Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night’s Journey Into Day*, 54.

²⁶³ McGarry, “The Crisis of Prayer,” in *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah*, 124.

²⁶⁴ For an analysis of whether the Holocaust can be read as a moment of revelation see Mark Lindsay “History, Holocaust and Revelation: Beyond the Barthian Limits,” *Theology Today* 61 (2005): 455-70.

²⁶⁵ Paul van Buren, *Discerning the Way: A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality* (Harper Collins, 1987), 176. Van Buren continues to describe the major identity crisis brought on by the Holocaust saying these events “have in point of fact effected a reorientation of the church at least sufficient to launch a major reinterpretation of our traditional understanding of the Jews and therefore of ourselves, and so at a point that touches every aspect of our tradition and theology.” *Discerning the Way*, 179.

²⁶⁶ Baum, *Christian Theology After Auschwitz*, 7.

²⁶⁷ Concomitant with this assumption that the Holocaust is revelatory are questions about the nature and authority of Scripture. Clark Williamson, among many others, deals with the issue of biblical authority at length. He is convinced that after the Holocaust, the church must grapple with what he calls “a profound crisis of scriptural authority” (*A Guest in the House of Israel*, 140). The urgent question being raised by Holocaust theologians is: how can a text that was used for centuries to justify anti-Jewish ideology and practices still be in any way considered authoritative for the church today? Many Holocaust theologians see Scripture as the taproot of antisemitism—labeling it inherently (and

Holocaust constitutes a total and permanent assault on Christianity's theological presuppositions. Clark Williamson asserts,

Post-Shoah theologians go about their business aware that they do theology after Auschwitz and in the light thrown by Auschwitz on the way the church has told its story for two millennia. Such theologians wish to criticize the situation in the light of what the Christian faith, appropriately understood, is all about it.²⁶⁸

2. ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION MUST BE THOROUGHLY EXPOSED

A second fundamental claim of Holocaust theologians is that the egregious underbelly of the *adversus Judaeos* tradition must be fully exposed. These theologians focus their critical endeavors on bringing anti-Jewish tendencies within Christian theology to the full light of day, convinced that the church's abysmal treatment of the Jewish people throughout the history of Christendom demands a radical hermeneutical shift if Christianity is ever to be credible vis-à-vis the Jewish faith.²⁶⁹ Stephen Haynes says Holocaust theologians have "assumed the role of the theological bloodhound sensitized to the distinctive signs of Christian anti-Judaism."²⁷⁰ This hermeneutic of suspicion toward the tradition demands nothing less than an extensive, internal critique of anti-Judaic texts, tendencies, and practices and a rejection of any theological reflection in which the Holocaust remains a "partial" or "non-event," as well as theologies which fail to fully recognize the crisis which the Holocaust poses for the Christian faith.²⁷¹

some would say even irredeemably) antisemitic. In light of the Holocaust, can (and should) Scripture continue to function as primary sources for Christian theology? Some theologians such as Clark Williamson say, yes, but only if it is radically revised. Because so much of Christian doctrine was filtered through the lens of an "anti-Jewish hermeneutic," Williamson says a radical surgery is required that would remove elements of traditional Christology and soteriology that are deemed severely flawed or inadequate. He highlights significant portions of the New Testament that "bear on them the scars left over from first-century conflicts. The animosities felt by small, beleaguered, and alienated communities of two thousand years ago became part of Holy Scripture and are read and proclaim throughout Christian history until today as the 'word of God'" (*A Guest in the House of Israel*, 139). Williamson boldly avers "The anti-Judaism in the tradition, including the parts of the tradition defined as canonical, must be eliminated and a new interpretation offered that seeks both be more appropriate to the tradition and more plausible in a post-Shoah situation" (*A Guest in the House of Israel*, 18).

²⁶⁸ Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 15.

²⁶⁹ Glenn David Earley, "The Radical Hermeneutical Shift in Post-Holocaust Christian Thought," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 18:1 (1981), 16-32.

²⁷⁰ Haynes, *Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment*, 558.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

Holocaust theologians take Irving Greenberg's oft-quoted admonition as a methodological starting point for their reflection: "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children."²⁷² They are also guided by the working principle articulated by Johann-Baptist Metz: "Ask yourselves if the theology you are learning is such that it could remain unchanged before and after Auschwitz. If this is the case, be on your guard."²⁷³ Holocaust theologians reproach any theology that does not take the Holocaust seriously as "pre-Holocaust," such theology could only be dangerous and hegemonic in the post-Holocaust world in which we are situated.

Holocaust theologians react strongly to what Haynes labels the rhetoric of discontinuity, that is the claim that the Holocaust was the work of an anti-Christian, thoroughly pagan regime, a murderous juggernaut which would eventually prey on Christians too.²⁷⁴ The discontinuity fallacy contends that Christians bear no (or at least minimal) responsibility for the Holocaust because *true* Christians do not commit murder, nor do they hate Jews. These assertions are problematic because they falsify history, leave the root causes of Jew-hatred untapped, and allow Christians to shirk moral responsibility.²⁷⁵ Haynes says the discontinuity fallacy can be found in a number of ecclesial statements, and in the scholarship of both conservative and liberal Christians who "do not believe something as ugly as anti-Semitism can be located at the heart of authentic Christian belief."²⁷⁶

²⁷² Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Eva Fleischer, ed. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977), 23. Douglas K. Huneke expands on Greenberg's criteria for post-Holocaust preaching, teaching, and theology saying it "must have a radical and sustained point of origin and be weighed by one of the most demanding standards imaginable. The point of origin must be at the ledge of a filling mass grave, below the hose disguised as a shower head in a gas chamber, beside a wall that bears the bloodstained mark of an infant's skull. It must begin in the presence of burning children." Douglas Huneke, *The Stones Will Cry Out: Pastoral Reflections on the Shoah* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 21.

²⁷³ See Metz *The Emergent Church*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 28.

²⁷⁴ For example the Vatican's *We Remember* § IV claims that the Holocaust was the work of "a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, it did not hesitate to oppose the Church and persecute her members also."

²⁷⁵ "Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity" in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Mercer University Press: Macon, 2001), 4.

²⁷⁶ Haynes, *Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment*, 570. Stephen T. Davis argues, for instance, that since active and serious followers of Jesus Christ *by definition* do not participate in murder, no "real" Christians actually took part in Nazi genocide against the Jews. Davis recognizes his argument is "somewhat circular," but believes it rescues "real Christianity" from complicity in the Holocaust. See Davis "'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology,'" *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, vol. 2:3 (1981), 121-129.

In an effort to avoid the fallacy of discontinuity, Holocaust theologians often resort to the authenticity fallacy. This view admits both Christian culpability in cultivating antisemitism and that this antisemitism was a significant contributing factor to the Holocaust, but it envisions anti-Judaism as an aberration, rather than as intrinsic to the Christian tradition. The remedy to this deeply rooted excrescence lies in the restoration of an untainted moral core of the Christian faith. Scholars working under this paradigm, however, fail to concretely identify what aspects of Jesus' message and teachings comprise this alleged original core, free from the corruption of anti-Judaism, nor do they delineate what Christian identity, expunged from all traces of anti-Judaism would even look like (and whether it would still be recognizable as Christian).

Holocaust scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether work under the assumption that completely expunging anti-Judaism from Christian doctrine is sufficient to remedy the grave moral failings of Christians during the Holocaust. This presumption that the churches' transgressions can be remedied by a simple return to "authentic" Christian faith, allows thorny questions which the Holocaust evokes to be superficially evaded (such as whether Christian faith is inherently and irredeemably anti-Jewish). Sarah Pinnock describes the dangers latent in the authenticity fallacy saying,

If perpetrator Christians simply did not understand the meaning of faith, it seems to follow that true, authentic Christians would never in any way cooperate with Nazis. This assumption is self-exonerating, and it ignores the complicated relationship between theological convictions and ethical action.²⁷⁷

Moreover, the doctrinal content and practices of this supposed "authentic" Christian faith are often left undefined and amorphous by those who employ the rhetoric of authenticity, thereby leaving Christian beliefs and practices largely unexamined and unchanged. Haynes says the authenticity fallacy "encourages Christians in the dangerous belief that the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism can be ended through

²⁷⁷ Pinnock, "Atrocity and Ambiguity: Recent Developments in Christian Holocaust Responses," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol.75:3 (2007), 507.

personal repudiations of antisemitic prejudice rather than serious analysis of the church's textual and historical traditions."²⁷⁸

In their intrepid efforts to avoid the perils of both the discontinuity and authenticity fallacies, Haynes says that Holocaust theologians tend to utilize the rhetoric of continuity (i.e. exaggerating the connection between Christian anti-Judaism and modern racial antisemitism). "In order to communicate Christian responsibility for the Holocaust, these thinkers have chosen to rely on rhetoric that is emotionally powerful but historically dubious."²⁷⁹ Based upon Christianity's enduring animosity towards Jews and the teaching of supersessionism, it is argued that the Nazis were simply continuing what Christianity started; thus the Christian faith is indicted as *the* cause for the Holocaust.²⁸⁰

3. ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION MUST BE THOROUGHLY EXPUNGED

A third contention on Holocaust theologians' manifesto is that all vestiges of anti-Judaism must be eradicated from Christian theology, once and for all. Holocaust theologians pursue a large-scale process of deconstruction in order to ascertain if, and how much, these anti-Judaic trends can be excised from the Christian tradition. They hold onto varying degrees of hope for a reconstructed Christian theology capable of eschewing all semblances of antisemitism so that hatred of Jews can never again gain a foothold in the Christian tradition. Alan Davis reflects this concern with the question, "If antisemitism is located at the core rather than the periphery, how

²⁷⁸ Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity" in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 4-5.

²⁷⁹ Haynes, "Christian Theology after Auschwitz" in *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell: The Impact of the Holocaust on Theology and Jewish-Christian Relations*, Jacques B. Doukhan ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 78.

²⁸⁰ Haynes, *Holocaust Education and the Church Related College*, 78. An example of this proclivity is found in G. Peter Fleck who writes "Every aspect of the Holocaust, from excluding the Jews from the profession, the unions and the universities, to tagging them with the yellow badge of the star of David, confining them in ghettos, burning their synagogues and ultimately burning the people themselves, had been rehearsed by the church for a millennium and a half." G. Peter Fleck, "Jesus in the Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *The Christian Century*, 100:29 (1983), 904. Likewise, Franklin Littell's asserts that "The cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with a genocidal note" (*The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 2). Another salient example of the rhetoric of continuity would be James Parkes' statement, "There is no break in the line which leads from the beginning of the denigration of Judaism in the formative period of Christian history, from the exclusion of Jews from civic equality in the period of the church's first triumph in the fourth century, through the horrors of the Middle Ages, to the Death Camps of Hitler in our own day. Cited in Marc Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 60.

much deconstruction is possible without eating into the substance of the faith itself?”²⁸¹ This commitment to root out the weed of anti-Judaism means that “there is little if any hallowed ground on the landscape of contemporary theology,” as Haynes points out.²⁸² Littell says of the malady within the Christian faith which the crisis of the Holocaust reveals, “It will not be cured until the churches face with utterly ruthless self-appraisal the meaning of that mass apostasy and trace it to its source.”²⁸³

In their efforts to fully purge all vestiges of antisemitism from Christian theology and practice, theologians typically adopt one of several approaches, which reflect the debate about how deeply the Nazi genocide was rooted in Christianity and how inextricable anti-Judaism is from Christian theology itself. Haynes isolates three distinct scholarly paradigms characterizing the methodological attitudes and assumptions with which scholars over the course of the last half century have approached the connection between antisemitism and the Christian tradition: the reformist paradigm, the radical paradigm, and the rejectionist paradigm.

The reformist paradigm emerged early on as scholars began the arduous task of grappling with Christianity’s tragic history towards the Jewish people. The guiding assumption within the reformist paradigm is “Christian anti-Judaism is regarded as a perennial but alien—and certainly not incorrigible—blight on Christianity. Antisemitism, in other words, is essentially foreign to authentic Christianity.”²⁸⁴ Even though scholars working within the reformist paradigm are not nearly as radical as those in the other two paradigms, they have still contributed substantially toward remedying the problem of antisemitism within Christian theology. For example, Jules Isaac, whose study on the teaching of contempt directly contributed to the profound theological revisions of the *Ten Points of Seelisberg* and subsequently *Nostra Aetate*, worked under the premise that at its core, genuine Christian faith was free of antisemitism; if Christianity could only extirpate the weed of antisemitism once and for all, then all would be well.

²⁸¹ Alan Davies, “The Holocaust and Christian Thought,” in *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds., (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 342.

²⁸² Haynes, *Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment*, 559.

²⁸³ Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 41.

²⁸⁴ Stephen R. Haynes, “Changing Paradigms: Reformist, Radical and Rejectionist Approaches to the Relationship between Christianity and Antisemitism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32:1 (1995), 65. A few scholars who are associated with the Reformist paradigm are James Parkes, Jules Isaac, Edward Flannery, and Leon Poliakov.

The overwhelming majority of Post-Holocaust ecclesial statements are characterized by the reformist paradigm, both in their analyses and suggestions, which tend to see antisemitism as a perversion of authentic Christian beliefs with no valid biblical or theological basis. Haynes laments that the tendency of those working within this paradigm is to presuppose that antisemitism is connected with Christian beliefs only superficially through historical circumstances. This assumption generates a false sense of optimism about both the diagnosis and the cure of *Judenhass* and reinforces the common notion that there is nothing substantial within *genuine* Christian faith that would provide a foothold for antisemitism.²⁸⁵

The second series of assumptions, the radical paradigm, came about in the 1970s, particularly through the pioneering work of Rosemary Radford Ruether²⁸⁶ whose seminal book *Faith and Fratricide* traced the roots of antisemitism back to the very inception of Christianity when the early Christians understood *themselves* as the new people of God who had superseded the Jews. Ruether's oft-quoted phrase "anti-Judaism developed as the left hand of Christology"²⁸⁷ portrays her contention that anti-Judaism cannot simply be dismissed as a deviation from "authentic" Christian faith. Repugnance for Jews is a demonic thread that runs all the way back to the first centuries of the Christian faith as the early Christians embarked on a mission to establish the rejected status and "spiritual blindness" of the Jewish people in order to bolster their claims that the church was the true and rightful heir of God's covenantal promises.²⁸⁸ In a similar vein, Franklin Littell, another noted scholar working under the radical paradigm maintains that,

The cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with a genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that 'the old Israel' was written off with the appearance of 'the

²⁸⁵ Stephen R. Haynes, "Christianity, Anti-Semitism, and Post-Holocaust Theology: Old Questions, Changing Paradigms," in *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars*, Rochelle L. Millen, Timothy Bennett, et al. eds. (New York University Press, 1996), 298. Also see, "Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity" in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Mercer University Press: Macon, 2001), 3-20.

²⁸⁶ Clark Williamson, Alice Eckardt, and A. Roy Eckardt are Holocaust theologians who also work within the radical paradigm.

²⁸⁷ "Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations" *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, Abraham J. Peck ed. (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1982), 25.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

new Israel.’ To teach that a people’s mission in God’s providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murderers will in time spell out.²⁸⁹

Thus, the radical paradigm holds that anti-Judaism is endemic, not incidental, to historical Christianity and consequently the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament are deeply infected with the affliction of animus towards Jews. Haynes says that even though anti-Judaism is seen as “woven into the fabric of the Christian story” the scholar working under this paradigm “never relinquishes the belief that vigorous scholarship can extricate authentic Christian faith from the Second Testament kerygma.”²⁹⁰

In contrast to the reformist paradigm, the radical paradigm claims that there *never was* an “authentic” version of Christianity, that is, a formulation of the Christian faith entirely uninfected with anti-Judaism. While maintaining that Christianity has always been anti-Jewish, both historically and doctrinally, many radical scholars do hold that antisemitism is not actually part and parcel of the core message of Jesus Christ, but is rather an excrescence stemming from the preaching of his earliest followers. Therefore, both the reformist and radical paradigms envision the possibility of isolating a stratum of “pure” Christianity that predated anti-Jewish influence. The reformist and radical paradigms are the most influential in shaping the way churches and Christian scholars reflect theologically on the Jewish-Christian relationship.

The third paradigm, which Haynes classifies as rejectionist, emerged in the 1970s as a result of radical scholar’s critical work in the field of Jewish-Christians relations. So-called rejectionist scholars were convinced that the Christian tradition had not yet been subjected to the thoroughgoing critique necessary to genuinely depict the genetic connection between antisemitism and Christianity. While radical scholars were willing to concede that anti-Judaism had been interwoven with the Christian faith since its inception, they still located a pristine essence of the Gospel with Jesus, whose teachings were harmonious with the world of first-century Judaism; and therefore subsequent anti-Jewish outgrowths were utterly incompatible

²⁸⁹ Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 2.

²⁹⁰ Stephen R. Haynes, “Changing Paradigms: Reformist, Radical and Rejectionist Approaches to the Relationship between Christianity and Antisemitism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32:1 (1995), 69.

with Jesus' own message and self-understanding. Not so for rejectionist scholars who reject the purported discontinuity between medieval religious anti-Judaism and modern radical antisemitism, as well as the notion that there once was a distillation of Christianity uncorrupted by anti-Jewish sentiment.²⁹¹

Haynes points to the work of two non-Christian scholars, Gavin Langmuir and Hyam Maccoby as indicative of the rejectionist paradigm. While the two have many differences in approach, they are united by their rejection of superficial distinctions between antisemitism and anti-Judaism. Maccoby contends "anti-Semitism is not merely an extraneous outcome of religious rivalry but forms an essential ingredient in the Christian myth of redemption."²⁹² Rejectionists claim that antisemitism is so deeply entrenched in the epicenter of Christian belief that the veritable *sine qua non* of the Christian faith is the "diabolization" of the Jewish people.²⁹³ Thus, says Haynes, for the rejectionist "there exists no version of Christian faith, regardless of how 'authentic' it is alleged to be, that is rescued easily, if at all, from the taint of anti-Semitism."²⁹⁴

Scholars working under these paradigms give significantly different answers about the possibilities for the Christian faith in the post-Holocaust age. While all portray anti-Judaism as a malady within Christianity that must be cured, they differ greatly regarding how extensive the infection and whether the patient (i.e. the Christian faith) can in fact, survive the operation necessary.

This quest to expunge antisemitism from Christian theology has led to a profound reconceptualization of a number of key Christian doctrines such as theodicy, anthropology, providence, and most notably the doctrines of Christology and soteriology, including concepts of election, missions and redemption. I will offer a glimpse of the trajectory this reconceptualization is taking by highlighting reformations in Christology and soteriology.

²⁹¹ Stephen R. Haynes, "Changing Paradigms: Reformist, Radical and Rejectionist Approaches to the Relationship between Christianity and Antisemitism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32:1 (1995), 70.

²⁹² Stephen R. Haynes, "Christianity, Anti-Semitism, and Post-Holocaust Theology: Old Questions, Changing Paradigms," in *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars*, Rochelle L. Millen, Timothy Bennett et al. eds. (New York University Press, 1996), 304.

²⁹³ Stephen R. Haynes, "Changing Paradigms: Reformist, Radical and Rejectionist Approaches to the Relationship between Christianity and Antisemitism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32:1 (1995), 75.

²⁹⁴ Stephen R. Haynes, "Christianity, Anti-Semitism, and Post-Holocaust Theology," 307.

The surgery to excise the malady of antisemitism ensconced in the Christian tradition has led Holocaust theologians to operate on the very heart of the Christian faith, the doctrine of Jesus Christ. John T. Pawlikowski describes this enterprise saying, “The Holocaust has unquestionably undercut many conventional Christological claims. It has rendered any Christological approach that portrays Jews and Judaism as religious relics a moral obscenity.”²⁹⁵ He adds, “There is a need to affirm without the slightest qualification that Auschwitz has made it immoral for Christians to maintain any Christology that is overly triumphalistic or that finds the significance of the Christ event in the elimination of the Jewish covenant.”²⁹⁶ Other Holocaust theologians such as Michael McGarry, Rosemary Ruether, Monika Hellwig, and Gregory Baum, to name but a few, labored for many years with how to articulate new self-definitions for Christianity that obliterate anti-Judaism and make space for the enduring validity of the Jewish faith.

Gregory Baum, for example, contends that Auschwitz must destroy certain Christological trends. Christianity, if it is to take Judaism seriously, must jettison the claim that Jesus is the one and only mediator without whom there is no salvation.²⁹⁷ Elsewhere, Baum urges the church to,

Re-think and re-formulate the Christ-event in a way that retains Jesus unalterable as the source of God’s judgment and new life for the believing community, but specifies that this dispensation of grace is only a prelude to the complete fulfillment of the messianic promises when God’s will be done on earth in the new age.²⁹⁸

Likewise for Ruether, “The messianic meaning of Jesus’ life, then, is paradigmatic and proleptic in nature, not final and fulfilled. It does not invalidate the right of those Jews not caught up in this paradigm to go forward on earlier foundations.”²⁹⁹ Monika

²⁹⁵ John T. Pawlikowski, “The Holocaust and Contemporary Christology,” in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, Fiorenza and Tracy eds., 49.

²⁹⁶ Pawlikowski, *Christ in Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 143.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Pawlikowski, *Christ in Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 142, 25.

²⁹⁸ Baum, Gregory. *Christian Theology after Auschwitz* (London: Council of Christians and Jews, 1977), 146.

²⁹⁹ Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 249. Elsewhere, Ruether argues, “We must accept its relativity to a particular people...the cross

Hellwig suggests that Christians re-conceive of the Christ event and its implications for salvation and adopt a perspective of simultaneous and complimentary participation in the same covenant with Judaism. This duty

requires a restatement of some key concepts for Christians. Central to this enterprise is the assertion that the Messiah indeed came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth...a more cautious formulation would be that the cry of the early Christian community, 'Jesus is Lord and Christ,' was and remains a prophetic assertion by which Christians have pledged themselves to a task of salvation yet to be accomplished. Even to the Christian there is a most important sense in which Jesus is not yet Messiah. The eschatological tension has not been resolved.³⁰⁰

A substantial debate concerns how to understand the relationship between Christianity and Judaism with regards to covenant and the significance of the Christ event. Two dominant frameworks are discernable in the way scholars conceive of the theological relationship between the Church and the Jewish people.³⁰¹

So-called "single covenant" or "one covenant" frameworks seek to maintain the unity of God's salvific plan by envisioning only one covenant in which Jews *and* Christians dwell. This single, ongoing covenant originated at Sinai and its point of entry for Jews is obedience to the Torah. The Christ event in no way ruptured or annulled this covenant but instead enabled Gentiles to graciously participate in

and the resurrection are contextual to a particular historical community. There are break through experiences which found *our* people, that mediate hope in the midst of adversity *for us*. But this does not mean that these are the only ways that this many happen, or that other people may not continue parallel struggles on different grounds, for example, the Jews, for whom the events in Jesus did not become paradigmatic events, and who continue to found themselves on the Exodus and the Torah as the memory and the way" ("Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations," 37).

³⁰⁰ Monika Hellwig, "Christian Theology and the Covenant of Israel," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 7:1 (1970), 49-50.

³⁰¹ It should be noted that a few scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Paul Knitter understand the Jewish-Christian relationship from within a multi-covenant framework whereby the Jewish and Christian covenants are reckoned as two among a number of covenants that God makes with different religious traditions. In this perspective, no one covenant can claim to be universal or normative for others. For more about how Jewish-Christian concepts of covenant might be integrated into the wider dialogue of world religions see Marcus Braybrooke's *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: The Next Steps* (London: SCM, 2000) as well as John T. Pawlikowski, "Toward a Theology of Religious Diversity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (1989) 138-153. Another perspective, represented by Jacob Neusner, sees Judaism and Christianity as entirely discrete religions. Neusner claims, "Judaism and Christianity are completely different religions, not different versions of one religions... The two faiths stand for different people talking about different things to different people" (*Jews and Christians: the Myth of a Common Tradition*, 1). For a critical approach to the centrism within both Judaism and Christianity and an alternative approach to the language of election and covenant, see Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)

Judaism's covenant with the God of Israel.³⁰² In this perspective, Christ's significance is seen in opening a point of entry for non-Jews to enter into a covenantal relationship with God, a relationship Jews continue to maintain irrespective of the Christ event.³⁰³ Monika Hellwig sheds light on this framework:

The believing Jew of today participates by virtue of his own religious tradition in the universal Church of God, because he orients his life by belief in Christ who is to come, though he does not concretely identify the Christ with the returning of Jesus of Nazareth...His faith is complementary with Christian faith as two aspects of the same reality, two historical approaches to the same eschatological fulfillment, two dimensions of mankind's relationship to God.³⁰⁴

While by no means univocal, single covenant adherents do generally agree that salvation for non-Jews lies in continuity with the Jewish covenant; that Christianity and the Christ event should be understood as "unique" in terms of expression rather than in content; and that Jews and Christians are intrinsically connected as equal partners in the salvation of humankind.³⁰⁵

Those who adhere to a "two covenant" or "double covenant"³⁰⁶ framework believe God instituted two unique, but equally valid covenants, one with the Jewish people and a second with Gentiles. The two faith communities, through their distinct qualities and contributions are seen as parallel and complementary to each other.³⁰⁷ It is argued that this two covenant reality was not discerned in the immediate aftermath of Christ's death and resurrection and therefore, this reality was not

³⁰² Cardinal Walter Kasper, "The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue" (see www.jcrelations.net).

³⁰³ Theologians who adhere to some variation of this position include Monika Hellwig, Paul Van Buren, Marcel Dubois, Bertold Klappert, Peter von der Osten. The speeches of Pope John Paul as well as statements of the Roman Catholic statement *Notes* seem to move in the trajectory of a single covenant perspective.

³⁰⁴ Quoted in Michael McGarry, *Christology After Auschwitz* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 94.

³⁰⁵ John Pawlikowski, *Jesus and the Theology of Israel* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989) 31.

³⁰⁶ German theologian Franz Mussner represents a significant example of the double covenant theory, as do Gregory Baum, Franz Mussner, James Parkes.

³⁰⁷ This so-called "two-covenant theory" is generally attributed to Franz Rosenzweig, in his work *The Star of Redemption*. Rosenzweig says, "Christianity acknowledges the God of the Jews, not as God but as 'The Father of Jesus Christ.' Christianity itself cleaves to the 'Lord' because it knows that the Father can be reached only through him... We are all wholly agreed as to what Christ and his church mean to the world: no one can reach the Father save through him. No one can reach the Father! But the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father because he is already with him. And this is true of the people of Israel." Quoted in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 341.

incorporated into the New Testament corpus. However, the acknowledgment of two separate, but equal covenants is necessary in retrospect in order to make authentic space for Judaism to exist in its own right.³⁰⁸

In summary, Holocaust theologians reject as “pre-Holocaust” any Christological conceptions which stress the uniqueness and finality of Christ, which demand Christ’s universality as the sole arbitrator of salvation, which envision Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic hopes, and which necessitate preaching Christ to the Jewish people. These notions are characterized as Christologies of discontinuity.³⁰⁹ Instead, Christologies of continuity are touted which confirm the enduring validity of the covenant with the Jewish people, see the Jewish ‘no’ to Jesus not as stubborn blindness but as a positive contribution to the salvation of humanity, and embrace the Jewish witness that the present world still waits for redemption.³¹⁰

The task of theologically reinterpreting the fundamental dimensions of Christology and soteriology in a way that eschews antisemitism and all remnants of triumphalism is considerable and ongoing. While there is a great deal more diversity and nuance within these scholarly endeavors than space allows here, some broad areas of general agreement can be observed within the work of Holocaust theologians: (1) the Christ event in no way invalidates the Jewish faith experience, (2) Christianity has neither surpassed or fulfilled Judaism, and (3) Christianity must stress the foundational link between Jesus and Judaism in order for its Christology to remain authentic to its original Jewish roots.

4. MISSIONARY ENDEAVORS TOWARDS JEWS MUST CEASE

A fourth foundational claim of Holocaust theology, springing from a revised soteriological perspective, is its insistence that Christians terminate the missionary

³⁰⁸ See for example, James Parkes, *Judaism and Christianity*, 1948.

³⁰⁹ See Didier Pollefeyt, “Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective” in *Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes, eds. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press), 229-248.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

enterprise toward the Jewish people, once and for all.³¹¹ Gregory Baum describes this shift away from conversionary methods:

After Auschwitz the Christian churches no longer wish to convert the Jews. While they may not be sure of the theological grounds that dispense them from this mission, the churches have become aware that asking the Jews to become Christians is a spiritual way of blotting them out of existence and thus only reinforces the effects of the Holocaust.³¹²

While Baum readily admits there is ambiguity about the theological rationale behind the call to abandon the missionary position, he calls for Christian churches to “enter into solidarity with the people in whose midst they serve, bear the burdens of life with them, and promote the self-discovery and humanization taking place in their midst.”³¹³ Baum says the churches now call the Jews brothers and sisters instead of trying to convert them.³¹⁴

A. Roy Eckardt points out that there are many Christians who reject missionary endeavors among Jews because of specific historical and moral considerations, such as Christendom’s long history of injustice and persecution toward the Jewish people which culminated in the atrocities of the Holocaust. While sensitivities to historical and moral circumstances are critical, Eckardt believes the cessation of any Christian agenda for converting the Jews must ultimately be repudiated on *theological* grounds. Eckardt insists that the refutation of a specific missionary effort to the Jews cannot ultimately be rooted in “some human yes or no” but must be built upon the theological foundation of the purpose of God for the

³¹¹ Roman Catholic theologian Michael McGarry outlines several reasons why Jews must be exempt from Christian efforts of evangelization. First he says there is the sentiment that “after what some Christians did (and did not do) during the Shoah, Christians should have the ‘good taste’ just to leave the Jews alone.” Second, “other Christians feel that this is a time to comfort Israel, ‘rather than to challenge Jews by direct evangelism’” Another ground which McGarry offers is that there are two covenants—one given to the Jewish people which remains valid, and a second for the Gentiles which was opened through Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, McGarry contends “Whatever appeal might have been in the First Century for Jews to become disciples of the Jesus, that situation is long past. The call today for a contemporary Jews to abandon their people is too much to ask.” McGarry, “Can Catholics Make an Exception? Jews and ‘The New Evangelization.’” (Remembering for the Future II: Berlin, Germany, March, 1994). Full text at http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/mcgarry.htm#20

³¹² Gregory Baum, “Rethinking the Church’s Mission after Auschwitz,” In *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, edited by Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), 113.

³¹³ Ibid, 116.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

people of Israel. He contends that the impossibility of a conversionist program toward the Jewish people must be rejected solely on confessional-theological grounds as a “theological impossibility.”³¹⁵ Elsewhere, Eckardt claims “It is held that, ultimately considered, there is no difference between murdering Jews in death camps and destroying their laic and spiritual identity through turning them into Christians.”³¹⁶ Roy and Alice Eckardt both speak of the urgency for the church “to put an end to all teachings of superiority and claims to exclusive possession of the means of salvation.”³¹⁷ This includes, “rejecting *on principle* all missionary efforts directed to Jews” because the conversionist perspective is still “a continuation of the Holocaust.”³¹⁸ After the Holocaust, “Countless Jews of our world will never be able to distinguish the cross from the swastika, nor ought they be expected to do so.”³¹⁹

Instead of conversion, Holocaust theologians generally concur that Christian mission should be conceived of in terms of a shared mission to be witnesses of the God of Israel, to hallow God’s name in the world, and to strive for justice, peace, and human dignity. Clark Williamson summarizes the reversal in the Christian approach to the Jews

The relationship of the church to the Jewish people today is based on the fact that both have been graciously and irrevocably called and claimed by God. Hence, the church has no conversionary mission to the Israel of God. Its mission to the people Israel is one of service (*diakonia*), not one of proclamation (*kerygma*).³²⁰

C. New Trends in Holocaust Scholarship

It should be noted that the Holocaust theologians summarized here mostly belong to the older, more radical generation of Holocaust scholarship. Sarah Pinnock draws

³¹⁵ *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christian*, 155.

³¹⁶ *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting*, 71.

³¹⁷ Roy Eckardt and Alice Eckardt, “After the Holocaust: Some Christian Considerations,” in *The Future of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. Norma H. Thompson and Bruce K. Cole (Schenectady, NY: Character Research Press, 1982), 111.

³¹⁸ Eckardt, “Post-Holocaust Theology: A Journey Out of the Kingdom of Night” in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* vol 1:2 (1986), 232. Eckardt is quoting Dr. Rudolf Pfisterer with the phrase “continuation of the Holocaust.”

³¹⁹ Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night’s Journey Into Day* (Detroit, MI, Wayne State Press, 1988), 115.

³²⁰ Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 250.

attention to a number of significant differences between the generation of scholars being surveyed here and more recent responses that began to emerge in the 1990s.³²¹

While more established Holocaust theologians such as Ruether were motivated by concerns for antisemitism and violence condoned by Christians, more recent scholars are driven by the inadequacies they encountered in previous scholars' responses, particularly related to patterns of evasion in public remembrance.³²²

Pinnock isolates some other distinguishing features within recent Christian responses which signal a new era in Christian Holocaust scholarship: (1) they do not defend a core of the Christian tradition which is free from anti-Judaism; (2) they locate their Holocaust scholarship biographically and culturally, a task which demands self-examination (subject positioning) of their personal background and exposure to the Holocaust and a clarification of motives for their research; (3) they identify with perpetrators instead of distancing themselves; and (4) they reflect on the societal dynamics of Holocaust representation, giving careful attention to the contemporary cultural context of Holocaust remembrance. Many of these scholars root also their work not only in the New Testament but also in the Hebrew Bible, which brings a different set of perspectives and problems to the fore.³²³ The newer generation of Holocaust scholars present a much more tempered and contextual approach to Holocaust scholarship and offers hope for a fresh trajectory within Jewish-Christian studies.

D. Conclusion

Holocaust theologians have made many commendable proposals toward reshaping Christian theology in a way that no longer denigrates Jews or Judaism. In light of Christianity's legacy of antisemitism culminating in the Holocaust, they have demanded that significant Christian doctrines such as Christology, bibliolatry,

³²¹ To name but a few of those working in the new generation of scholarship: Darrell Fasching in *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (1992), Stephen Haynes in *Jews and the Christian Imagination: Reluctant Witnesses* (1995), Katharina von Kellenbach in *Von Gott reden im Land der Täter* (2001), Tania Oldenhege in *Parables for Our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship after the Holocaust* (2002), Henry Knight in *Confessing Christ in a Post-Holocaust World* (2000), and Tod Linafelt in both *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (2000) and *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (2002).

³²² See Oldenhege, *Parables for Our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship after the Holocaust*, American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³²³ Sarah K Pinnock. "Atrocity and Ambiguity: Recent Developments in Christian Holocaust Responses," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75:3 (2007): 499-523 (especially 507).

covenant and election, the land and State of Israel, missions, theodicy, and ethics be forged in the crucible of Auschwitz. Among the most salient contentions which emerge from this crucible are: that antisemitism in all its manifold permeations is to be repudiated as demonic; that the covenant God made with the Jewish people remains valid; that Judaism is a living faith tradition and already dwells in a salvific relationship with God; that all forms of missionizing Jews are prohibited as a theological absurdity; that Christians have a duty to make Jewish survival a matter of utmost concern; that Christians must understand Jesus in his original Jewish context and must forge their religious identity “only in the face of the Jews.”³²⁴

The scholars within this genre are some of the most radical in their proposals toward revising traditional concepts within Christian theology in Hitler’s shadow. They have taken great strides towards compelling adherents of the Christian faith to reckon with the cancer of anti-Judaism embedded in their tradition. However, the

³²⁴ Johannes-Baptist Metz, “Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz” in *Concilium: The Holocaust as Interruption*, Fiorenze and Tracy eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984). There are two additional contentions of Holocaust theologians that must be mentioned here. First, is the conviction that Jewish-Christian solidarity must be recovered and reinforced. Holocaust theology is focused on discovering how a newly solidified Jewish-Christian relationship might be possible, convinced that such a solidarity is critical for both an authentic understanding of the Christian faith, and as a safeguard against future antisemitism and genocides. In a manner similar to the suggestions of the ecclesial statements, nearly every Holocaust theologian calls for re-Judaization of the Christian faith, although this is argued for and manifested in wide variety of ways. See Stephen R. Haynes, *Prospects for a Post-Holocaust Theology*, 6-7.

Another key contention for the majority of Holocaust theologians is that adamant support for the State of Israel is a Christian duty on account Christian culpability for Holocaust atrocities. This stance, which A. Roy Eckardt has coined “Christian Israelism” is seen as a pre-requisite for authentic Jewish-Christian dialogue and essential for anyone who takes the Holocaust with utmost seriousness. Holocaust theologians’ support for Israel is rooted not only in political or ethical motivations, but the rebirth of the nation of Israel and the restoration of the Jewish people from the ashes of the Holocaust, is often understood as a miraculous sign of hope for beleaguered peoples everywhere. Haynes points out how this “occasionally uncritical support for the State of Israel” is one of the problematic aspects of Holocaust theology. (See *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell*, 78-79). For a helpful discussion on this issue, see Robert Andrew Everett “The Land: Israel and the Middle East in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in Shermis and Zannoni, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 87-117. For resources on the notion of Eretz Israel in Judaism see: Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimensions of Judaism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1982) and Anthony Kenny, *Catholics, Jews, and the State of Israel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

The relationship between the church and State of Israel is among the most serious and complex questions for Christian theology, and one that is regrettably beyond the scope of this work to grapple with. I am, however, particularly cognizant of the problematic notion of the “Palestinian Other,” which comes vividly to light through this research. This critical issue merits significantly more scholarly attention and is at the forefront of proposals for further study which stem from this work. It is hoped that this work will provide a solid foundation on which to build an analysis of the otherization of the Palestinian people within the context of Jewish-Christian relations.

influence of Holocaust theologians has been minimal within ecclesial communities, due largely to the extreme and often alienating nature of their proposals.

Haynes points out several traits of Holocaust theologians which tend to minimize their efforts by isolating average Christian people in the pews. For example, Holocaust theologians' insistence that the Holocaust and antisemitism be placed at the pinnacle of the theological agenda does not resonate with many congregations who do not consider the Holocaust as revelatory nor as posing any real crisis for their faith.³²⁵ The work of Holocaust theologians is also significantly hampered because of their "lack of empathy for the theological universe most people inhabit," particularly evidenced by the extremist and polemical nature of some of their claims which demand Christians abandon critical aspects of their faith, such as the deity of Christ or the doctrine resurrection.³²⁶ There is an expansive gulf between scholarly revisionism and the incorporation of these revisions at the grassroots level in the churches because Holocaust theologians fail "to appreciate the kinds of changes which are within the church's realm of possibility."³²⁷ These traits, says Haynes, have both limited their influence with people in the pews and have "relegated them to the margins of the academy."³²⁸ Thus, the work of these Holocaust scholars is, in many ways, hermetically sealed off from the dialogue taking place between Christians and Jews within the churches.

Taken as a whole, Holocaust Theology has been critical in nature rather than constructive. It has dared to posit painful and perplexing questions and has proffered very disconcerting conclusions. Unfortunately, it has seldom managed to surpass this critical stance towards offering constructive and practical solutions, particularly

³²⁵ Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 270.

³²⁶ Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment," 576. One example of the radical and unpalatable claims which Holocaust theologians tend to make is A. Roy Eckardt, who has notoriously stated that because belief in the resurrection of Jesus has been a root of Christian supersessionism and triumphalism, it may be a religious and moral impossibility. "It is the teaching of the consummated Resurrection which lies at the foundation of Christian hostility to Jews and Judaism, for only with that teaching does Christian triumphalist ideology reach ultimate fulfillment. Only here are the various [claims of the church] furnished with the capstone of an event that is exclusively God's and that in this way vindicates every other claim. The Resurrection is the relentless force behind every other Christian derogation of Jewry." A. Roy Eckardt with Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 130.

³²⁷ Haynes, *Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment*, 576.

³²⁸ See Haynes, *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell*, 79-80.

concrete solutions which are relevant for practical theology and ecclesiology.³²⁹ A lacuna exists, even within the work of the most radical thinkers within Christian Holocaust scholarship, regarding the implications of the churches' behavior under the Third Reich for shaping ecclesial practices. This lacuna will become even more pronounced after considering the post-Holocaust landscape through the lens of a rejection of otherness, a task to which we now turn.

³²⁹ Two post-Holocaust works which deal explicitly with ecclesiology are Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993) and Paul van Buren's trilogy *A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality*.

CHAPTER III: PROBLEMATIC TRENDS WITHIN POST-HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY

The message of the Holocaust to Christian theology... is that at whatever cost to its own self-understanding, the church must be willing to confront the ideologies implicit in its doctrinal tradition. We must be willing to sever ourselves from the ideological deformation, whatever they may be, even if we do not know as yet how to formulate the positive content of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, even if we must live with a few question marks for awhile.¹

This chapter will analyze three significant patterns within Christian post-Holocaust theology, which were brought to light in the previous chapter. These threads will be assessed through the lens of a rejection of otherness and its deleterious implications for ecclesiology, which were presented in chapter one. Section one will explore the dominant emphasis on Jewish-Christian commonalities, which is seen as a curative to antisemitism and a reliable foundation for a new relationship between Christians and Jews in the post-Holocaust era. Section two will investigate the perpetuation of the witness people myth, the tendency to instrumentalize Jews, and define them in terms not consonant with their own self-definitions. Section three will survey the problematic myopia towards non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution and the difficult questions raised by the church's passivity towards others labeled as "unfortunate expendables" in the Third Reich. These patterns will be assessed primarily with a focus on their practical implications for ecclesiology, in hopes of illuminating some areas where constructive work remains to be completed.

Our survey of ecclesial statements and the work of Holocaust theologians elucidated that Christian culpability in the Holocaust is chiefly attributed to the church's legacy of antisemitism (i.e. the teaching of contempt). Antisemitism is seen as the primary factor which militated against the churches taking a strong ethical stance on behalf of the majority of victims of the Nazi regime. Thus, in response to the question, *what went wrong with the churches during the Holocaust*, the dominant answer given is that antipathy toward Jews anesthetized the Christian conscience to the injustice and persecution against the Jewish people and effectively dulled their capacity to feel empathy for those who were swept into the maelstrom of

¹ Gregory Baum, *Christian Theology After Auschwitz* (Council of Christians and Jews, 1977), 12.

Nazi destruction.² Berger and Patterson confirm this diagnosis saying, “The Shoah reveals with absolute clarity what happens when the malignancy of antisemitism spreads and goes untreated.”³ Because traditional Christian theology allowed no theological space for Jewish existence, in *Hitlerzeit* this ultimately translated into not allowing Jews physical space for existence either. Antisemitism is thus an oncological corruption which has metastasized the ecclesial body; it must be thoroughly and swiftly excised if those tendencies which led to Christian apathy and even complicity in the Holocaust are to be eradicated from Christian ideology and practice.⁴ John Pawlikowski argues that in response to the cancer of antisemitism, “Christians have a moral obligation in the post-Holocaust era to wipe out any vestiges of this cancer embedded in the institutional church,” a procedure he calls “spiritual chemotherapy.”⁵

This chapter will analyze both the diagnosis of antisemitism as the fundamental reason for the churches’ (almost) wholesale ethical failure during the Holocaust, as well as some problematic assumptions and hegemonic tendencies which are found in the proposed cure.

² To contribute an additional example of this trend which was highlighted in chapter two: at a meeting of the CCJ held on the 50th anniversary of *Kristallnacht* in 1988, Dr. Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged that the roots of these events lay in the preceding centuries of Christian anti-Semitism saying, “Without centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, Hitler’s passionate hatred would never have been so passionately echoed.... even today there are many Christians who fail to see it as self evident and why this blindness? Because for centuries Christians have held Jews collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.... Without the poisoning of Christian minds through the centuries, the Holocaust is unthinkable. *Common Ground*, CCJ, London 1989, No. 1 Kristallnacht Memorial Meeting.

³ See *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 250.

⁴ While the vast majority of ecclesial statements and theologians assessed here isolate antisemitism as *the* fundamental problem and propose a cure for post-Holocaust Christian theology based on this diagnosis, there are other factors mentioned as well—such as the long-standing tradition of unquestioning obedience to authority, the two kingdoms doctrine which sharply differentiated between the church’s role and the state’s role, the totalitarian nature of the Nazi regime which left little room for opposition, and poor access to knowledge about what was happening, to name but a few. There was certainly a constellation of factors that shaped the behavior of the churches during the Nazi era, in addition to the deeply entrenched tradition of anti-Judaism within the churches. This work does not mean to imply that Christian post-Holocaust literature completely overlooks these issues, simply that antisemitism is given primacy as the most significant, militating factor.

⁵ John T. Pawlikowski, “Gibson’s Passion in the Face of the Shoah’s Ethical Considerations,” in *Pondering the Passion: What’s at Stake for Christians and Jews*, Philip A. Cunningham, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 160.

I. PROBLEMATIC EMPHASIS ON JEWISH-CHRISTIAN COMMONALITIES

In this section I will analyze the cure that is put forth to remedy the church's long-standing legacy of antisemitism, i.e. re-discovering commonalities and re-solidifying the bonds of unity between Jews and Christians on the basis of common ground. After briefly revisiting this pattern through examples from post-Holocaust documents, I will highlight some potentially problematic aspects for Christian practice, which begin to emerge when refracted through the lens of otherness. I will argue that this tendency to emphasize Jewish-Christian commonalities, while springing from noble intentions to facilitate interfaith harmony after centuries of antipathy, can actually exacerbate the problem of a rejection of otherness. The quest for purported commonalities as a foundation for a new Jewish-Christian relationship is problematic because (1) significant differences between the two faiths are superficially glossed over and boiled down to a common denominator in an effort to achieve unity, (2) this process entails, to a considerable degree, removing the mystery and strangeness of the Other in an effort to cultivate familiarity—thus making Jews less “Other” to Christians and vice-versa, and (3) the quest for Jewish-Christian solidarity has potentially devastating implications for our understanding of the church's solidarity with people of other faiths (or with those who hold no religious affiliations).

A. Common Roots

In order to begin the process of eradicating the cancer of antisemitism, post-Holocaust theologians and ecclesial statements call for a renewed emphasis on the deeply-held, common roots which Christianity shares with Judaism. The prognosis that antisemitism can and must be eradicated through rediscovering and re-solidifying the deep, spiritual bond linking Christians with Jews pervades nearly every document surveyed in this work. Whether implicitly or explicitly, these documents reiterate the close patrimony of Christians and Jews and affirm robust expressions of solidarity *on this basis*. For example, “To the Jews our God has

bound us in a special solidarity linking our destinies together in His design”⁶ and Jews and Christians are “linked together at the very level of their identity.”⁷

For Christians, the relationship with Judaism is *sui generis* because the bonds between the two faiths are simply without parallel. Thus, Jew-hatred is disavowed on the grounds of Christianity’s intimate relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people. The churches’ craven behavior under Nazism sounds a clarion call to Christians to recollect the sacred unity they share with the Jewish faith, a oneness that was all but forgotten for centuries throughout Christian history. Not only should antisemitism be eradicated because of Christianity’s common origins and shared spiritual characteristics with Judaism, but because Christians need Jews *for their very spiritual survival*, since Christian identity is inextricably linked with Judaism. It is argued that Christianity is dependent upon Judaism because Jews constitute their “spiritual roots” and “beloved elder brother.” Thus, antisemitism is tantamount to spiritual suicide and is reckoned as “a sin against God and man.”⁸ Brockway says, “*Because God remains in covenant with the people of Israel, antisemitism—hatred, persecution, prejudice against the Jewish people—is sin, which is to say conscious and intentional rejection of God.*”⁹

Christianity’s rediscovery of its own Jewish roots signals one of the most significant developments to emerge from this new era of theological self-critique since the Holocaust. In fact, virtually every theological and doctrinal revision that has taken place in the realm of Jewish-Christian relations springs directly from this discovery. The intimate heritage betwixt the two peoples is described in terms of “siblings” by Jewish scholars such as Alan Segal and the late Hayim Perelmuter, or

⁶ The First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, 1948, quoted in Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London: Stimulus Books, 1977), 69.

⁷ *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church*, June 24, 1985, § 1.2. Likewise, the “spiritual bonds and historical links” which bind the Church to Judaism “render obligatory a better mutual understanding and renewed mutual esteem.” in *Guidelines*, § Preamble.

⁸ The First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, Holland, 1948, quoted in Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London: Stimulus Books, 1977), 70.

⁹ Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 185 (emphasis mine).

“fraternal twins” by Mary C. Boys, or “partners in waiting” by Clark Williamson, or “coemergent religious communities” by Daniel Boyarin.¹⁰

As early as 1948 at the WCC conference in Amsterdam, this special bond is emphasized: “To the Jews our God has bound us in a special solidarity, linking our destinies together in his design.” Likewise, “Historically and theologically, the church has a very near relation to the Jewish people. There the Christian faith has its roots.”¹¹ The 1980 Synod of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland also encapsulates this notion stating, “It is not you who support the root, but the root that support you” (Romans 11:18b).¹² Christians are admonished not to forget that “The Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree on to which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles.”¹³ Thus to destroy the Jewish people is to threaten the very roots which sustain and nourish the Christian faith. If the roots of a plant are severed, the plant inevitably dies. Jews become indispensable for the nourishment of the church.

The almost sacrosanct notion within Christian-Jewish dialogue of a shared “Judeo-Christian heritage” has received strong criticism, particularly from Jewish scholars, as both simplistic and ahistorical in its attempts to appeal to a nonexistent historical unity between Christians and Jews. Eliezer Berkovits says,

What is usually referred to as the “Judeo-Christian tradition” exists only in Christian or secularist fantasy. As far as Jews are concerned, Judaism is fully sufficient. There is nothing in Christianity for them. Whatever in Christian teaching is acceptable to them is borrowed from Judaism.¹⁴

Likewise, Arthur Cohen and Jacob Neusner have both pointed out in great detail that that the “myth” of a Judeo-Christian tradition is a distortion of reality, and

¹⁰ John T. Pawlikowski, “The Ever-Deepening Understanding of Jewish-Christian Bonding: *Nostra Aetate* at Forty,” in *Chicago*, volume 44:2 (2005) 205.

¹¹ Both of these statements can be found in Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*. Likewise, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People (cf. *Nostra Aetate* no. 4), the first to hear the Word of God (*Missale Romanum*, 13). The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 839.

¹² Sherman, *Bridges*, 136. Likewise, *Guidelines* reinforces that “Christianity sprang from Judaism, taking from it certain essential elements of its faith and divine cult.” *Guidelines*, § Preamble.

¹³ § 5 of *We Remember*.

¹⁴ Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 44-45

conveniently bypasses a 2000 year historical narrative of ideological and theological aversion toward and persecution of Jews by Christians.¹⁵ Jon Levenson also notes the disturbing tendency to hide from inconvenient truths by harkening back to the myth of a joint tradition, which leaves the impression “that the nearly two thousand years of Jewish-Christian disputation were based on little more than the narcissism of small differences.”¹⁶

When using the phrase “Judeo-Christian,” “Judeo” typically means something radically different for Christians than what Jewish means for Jews. The plethora of post-Holocaust statements purporting Christian dependence on Judaism raises a host of questions about the meaning of the term “Judaism,” as it is being utilized in these statements. When Christians speak of Jews and Judaism, whether on a theological level or simply a personal level, the tendency is to envision Judaism and the Jewish people in rather monolithic terms, neglecting that, in reality, Judaism is multifaceted, fluid, and complex, encompassing a wide diversity of perspectives; in the same way there is no monolithic picture of Christianity. This tendency towards essentialization fails to acknowledge the incredible multiplicity of practice and belief within contemporary Jewish communities. Thus, speaking in terms of “Judaism” or “the Jewish view” is already a problematic starting point for an authentic encounter with the Jewish Other; it risks distorting and oversimplifying, and can easily lead to a reification of Jewish identity. When viewed through the lens of otherness, the hazards of the tendency to envision the identity of the Other in static, mythical terms becomes apparent, and the task of listening carefully to the way the Other describes himself or herself becomes imperative.

While intended to establish a close spiritual connection between Christianity and Judaism as a basis to preclude further genocides against the Jewish people, the view that Christianity is essentially an appendix to Judaism or “Judaism for

¹⁵ Cohen argues that the myth of a shared heritage betwixt Jews and Christians is actually a product of Enlightenment intellectuals who portrayed both Christianity and Judaism as antithetical to rationality. Arthur Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Schocken Books, 1971), xviii. See also Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (Global Academic Publishing, 2001) and Hans Jonas, “Judaism, Christianity & the Western Tradition,” *Commentary*, vol 44:5 (Nov 1967), 61-70. Jon Levenson’s work *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2012) describes the way Abraham is seen as the patriarchal founder of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The term “Abrahamic,” is commonly employed to construct a shared foundation for the three great monotheistic faiths.

¹⁶ Jon D. Levenson, “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary* 112:5, (2001), 37.

Gentiles”¹⁷ can actually be an impediment to a genuine encounter with the Other qua Other. The fallacy which many of these documents fall prey to, is seeking to establish common origins between Christians and Jews in a way that blurs the vital distinctions between the two religions and ultimately threatens to undermine religious self-identity for the sake of interfaith solidarity. The dominant paradigm functioning here is one that minimizes religious differences and instead seeks to isolate and process differentiations by means of linking them with common ground. We will briefly explore a few more of the historical, biblical, liturgical, and doctrinal aspects Jews and Christians ostensibly share within this paradigm.

B. A Common God

The roots connecting Judaism and Christianity spring from worship of a common Creator God, with whom both Christians and Jews share a covenantal relationship. For example “Because the Father of Jesus Christ is the God of Israel, Israel is connected with our faith in God; the connection with the people Israel is part of the church’s proclamation of faith in God.”¹⁸ Likewise, “We affirm that the living God whom Christians worship is the same God who is worshipped and served by Jews. We bear witness that the God revealed in Jesus, a Jew, to be the Triune Lord of all, is the same one disclosed in the life and worship of Israel.”¹⁹

This frequent claim that Jews and Christians worship the same God is cited in post-Holocaust theology as an essential wellspring of fellowship between the faiths. In the pursuit for unity, however, the contention too eagerly whitewashes over critical differences between the diversity of conceptions of the Divine. Consider, for instance, the Evangelical Church in Germany’s statement that says,

The basic Jewish credo in our time as in those days is “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Jesus and his disciples also pronounced these words as part of their daily prayer, as the Jews do even today. That same statement became the basis of the first article of the Christian confession of faith.²⁰

¹⁷ What Stephen Haynes calls “Appendicism,” in *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 276.

¹⁸ Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 91.

¹⁹ Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 109.

²⁰ Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 74.

Upon closer examination, the core Jewish confession of the Shema seems fundamentally distinct from the Christian confession of the Nicene Creed that the incarnated Jesus Christ is “true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the father. Through him all things were made.” The simplistic assertion that the Jewish understanding of the God of Abraham is essentially the same as the triune God of the Christian faith is both historically erroneous and theologically false, even if admirable in its intentions.²¹ As Levenson points out: “Participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue often speak as if Jews and Christians agreed about God but disagreed about Jesus. They have forgotten that in a very real sense, orthodox Christians believe Jesus is God.”²²

Coupled with this claim of a shared God, post-Holocaust statements summon a fresh emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus and the need to listen to the voices of Jewish scholars who have studied him in his Palestinian context. This resurgence of scholarship seeks to reintegrate Jesus and the early Christian church within the context of the Jewish community in the first and second centuries of the Common Era.²³ This new accentuation on Jesus in his first-century, Judean context paints a portrait of Jesus who participates fully in Jewish life, attending synagogue, worshiping at Temple, and reading and interpreting Scripture. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus argues with other Jews over *how* to be Jewish, but not whether or not they *should* be Jewish. He spars with the Pharisees about the interpretation of the law, but not about its validity. In sum, he is Jewish through and through. Clark Williamson comments on this trend in post-Holocaust theology saying, “The Jewishness of Jesus shines through the churches’ teaching documents with a clarity previously unachieved in church history.”²⁴

²¹ Furthermore, historically Christians have deemed many modes of Jewish worship of God to be obsolete and have viewed the Mosaic law as essentially abrogated and superseded with advent of Christ and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit.

²² Levenson also notes that Jews have not always been convinced that Christians worship the same God. Many, such as Maimonides, explicitly classified Christianity as idolatry on account of their Trinitarian beliefs. Jon D. Levenson, “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary* 112 (5) (December 2001), 37.

²³ See, for example, Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshire Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 95 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Anthony J. Saldarini, “Jews and Christians in the First Two Centuries: The Changing Paradigm,” *Shofar* 10 (1992) 32-43; and John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

²⁴ Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, 41.

Illustrative of the renewed emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus, is “We confess Jesus Christ the Jew, who as the Messiah of Israel is the Savior of the world and binds the peoples of the world to the people of God.”²⁵ The notion that Jesus “never severed the bonds with His people”²⁶ and that to encounter Jesus is to ineluctably encounter the Jewish faith is a profound reversal of nearly two millennia of Christian teaching, which reckoned that to encounter Jesus was an antagonist of Judaism.²⁷

In spite of these noteworthy advances in biblical scholarship, the facile contention that Jesus and his disciples were “Jewish” betrays the assumption within many post-Holocaust Christian documents that what we mean by “Jewish” in the late Second Temple period is commensurable to being Jewish today. Hannah Holtschneider points out how post-Holocaust theology tends to employ terminology like “Jews” and “Israel” interchangeably to connote both biblical and post-biblical times regardless of context. She notes, “The way traditional theology speaks about Jewish people is different from the way it treats other peoples mentioned in the Bible. Greeks and Romans, for example are not assumed to be identical with Greeks and Romans in the modern world...”²⁸

The susceptibility to oversimplification and circumventing complex questions in an effort to attain a semblance of theological reciprocity is endemic within scholarship on the post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relationship. The unfortunate practical implication of this propensity is that papering over differentiations and reducing religious beliefs down to artificial categories is seen as a necessary task for the cultivation of interfaith harmony. Rather than celebrating richness and nuanced diversity and embracing radical otherness, commonalities are vigorously (and often

²⁵ In Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 93.

²⁶ In Croner, *Stepping Stones*, 53.

²⁷ Robin Scroggs offers a concise summary of the trajectory of scholarship on the Jewishness of Jesus. First, the movement Jesus began in Palestine can be best described as a reform movement *within Judaism*. There is scant evidence that Christians during this period had a separate identity from Jews. Second, Paul understood his missionary endeavors as a Jewish mission aimed at the Gentile. Third, before the Jewish war ended in 70 C.E., there was no such reality as Christianity because Jesus’ followers did not have a self-understanding of themselves as a religion over and against Judaism. A distinctive Christian identity only began to emerge after the Jewish-Roman war. Finally, later portions of the New Testament show signs of a movement towards separation, but they also tend to preserve a connection with their Jewish matrix. See Robin Scroggs, “The Judaizing of the New Testament,” *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, 75 (1986).

²⁸ *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Münster: Fundamental Theologische Studien 24, Lit. Verlag, 2001), 38.

dubiously) stressed as a strategy to foster solidarity. Without such shared spiritual heritage, is there any hope for fostering solidarity with the Other? The subliminal message here, with tremendous import for practical theology, is that churches must identify (or manufacture) a locus of rich commonality with others, in order to cultivate a sense of community with them. This tendency to grasp at commonalities as a basis for mutuality and dialogue is trenchantly observed by Jon Levenson in his critique of the statement *Dabru Emet*.²⁹ In light of the tumultuous history between Christians and Jews he says,

It is inevitably tempting...to avoid any candid discussion of fundamental beliefs and to adopt instead the model of conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation. The goal thus becomes reaching an agreement...Commonalities are stressed, and differences—the reason, presumably, for entering into the dialogue in the first place—are minimized, neglected, or denied altogether.³⁰

As chapter one illumined, this rejection of otherness and the concomitant evasion of disconcerting differences comes at a very steep price.

C. A Common Mission

Another professed sphere of commonality between Jews and Christians is that of a common mission. As elucidated in chapter two, the concept of mission has been profoundly reconceived in Jewish-Christian scholarship since the Holocaust. Within many post-Holocaust ecclesial statements and within the work of nearly all Holocaust theologians, mission is no longer envisaged in terms of proselytism or conversion; instead mission is regarded as a shared endeavor between Christians and

²⁹ *Dabru Emet*, which comes from Zechariah 8:16, meaning “speak the truth,” was composed by four esteemed professors of Jewish Studies: Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs and Michael Signer. The statement was signed by some 170 other rabbis and Jewish scholars and published in the *New York Times* and several other venues. After describing the radical change in Jewish-Christian relations in the past decades, *Dabru Emet* outlines eight theses: Jews and Christians worship the same God, they hold the same book to be authoritative (the Tanakh or Old Testament), Christians can respect the Jewish claim on the land of Israel, Jews and Christians accept the moral principles outlined in the Torah, Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon, some irreconcilable differences between the two faiths will not be resolved until God redeems the world, a new relationship between Christians and Jews will not weaken Jewish practice, and Jews and Christians must work together for peace and justice. Many of the problematic tendencies endemic with Christian post-Holocaust theology are patent here as well.

³⁰ Jon D. Levenson, “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary* 112:5, (2001), 33.

Jews to proclaim to the nations the God of Israel and to work to mend a world in need of redemption. As possessors of this common hope, Jews and Christians have a mutual commitment to work towards justice, peace, and the common good of humankind.

This propensity to proclaim a common mission between Christians and Jews is evidenced for example, “We affirm that Jews and Christians are partners in waiting...Christians and Jews together await the final manifestation of God’s promise of the peaceable kingdom.”³¹ Similarly, the Catholic Church “now recognizes that Jews are also called by God to prepare the world for God’s kingdom.”³² Finally, “In this time before the ultimate fulfillment, we as the church are called together with the people of Israel to be true to our vocation...the Jewish people and the church are both travelers and both are preserved each in its own way, in God’s faithfulness.”³³

The assertion that Jews and Christians are both called by God to work together for justice and peace prompts a host of questions about the precise conception of potentially platitudinal phrases such as “justice and peace.” Who defines these terms? What exactly is the good of humankind? Who dictates what this common mission should look like and how it should be accomplished? The assumption that Jews and Christians share a common mission rather naively assumes that when it comes to the complex notions of justice, peace, righteousness, and the good of humankind, there are no fundamental disparities between Christians and Jews, nor internal disputes within various branches of Judaism and Christianity.

Furthermore, banalities such as that Jews and Christians share a common mission beg the question: is working together for justice and peace to be restricted simply to Jews and Christians? Should not all those interested be invited to take part in this endeavor, regardless of whether they are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist,

³¹ The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, 1987, Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 118.

³² The Catholic reflection *Covenant and Mission*. Full text at https://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/nscs_usccb120802.htm. Likewise, Pope John Paul II spoke of the Church and the Jewish people as having a joint witness to the world which should be “marked by the Ten Commandments, in the observance of which [humanity] finds [its] truth and freedom.” John Paul II, Address in the Great Synagogue of Rome (April 13, 1986), no. 6. In *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 65).

³³ General Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church, 1970 in Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 60.

secularist, or otherwise? And who is responsible for offering the invitation and setting the agenda for justice and peace? The potential for domination of the Other becomes apparent here.³⁴

D. A Common Scripture

Another node of commonality lies in harkening back to the “Old” Testament as a mutual foundation, maintaining that both Christians and Jews affirm the moral principles of the Torah. This claim is reflected in ecclesial statements such as,

The first Christians, like all Jews, had a number of biblical books which basically correspond to what the Church later called the “Old Testament.”...Christians as well as Jews, derived abundant instruction from the Scriptures for everyday life, prayer, sermons and worship.³⁵

Our relations to the Jewish people are determined by the common heritage of the Old Testament or Tenach and by the search for its adequate interpretation. This heritage constitutes the firm common ground for Jews and Christians.³⁶

To improve Jewish- Christian relations, it is important to take cognizance of those common elements of the liturgical life (formulas, feasts, rites, etc.) in which the Bible holds an essential place.³⁷

³⁴ In conjunction with the claim to a common mission, another area of purported unity between Jews and Christians which is highly problematic in its superficial assumptions, is that they both share a common eschatological hope in the coming of God’s rule and reign in the world. For example, “The Old Testament...joins the Christian community and the Jewish people together by the common hope in the victory of God’s rule.” The Synod of the Evangelical Church of Berlin (West), 1984 Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 102. Also, “Jews and Christians are partners in waiting...Christians and Jews await the final manifestation of God’s promise of the peaceable kingdom.” The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987 in Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 118. Likewise, Cardinal Walter Kasper says, Jews and Christians share a common root with one another and a common hope for one another. Regardless of the Christological difference they are, in the current eschatological interim, two concurrent parts of God’s one people on the basis of guilt and even greater grace, co-existing as rivals in the positive as well as in the conflict-ridden sense of the word. They have to follow the path of history beside one another.” See “The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant” at: https://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Kasper_Cambridge_6Dec04.htm.

³⁵ Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, 1975 in Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 76.

³⁶ Synod of the Evangelical Church of Berlin (West), 1980, in Brockway, *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, 102.

³⁷ See Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate”* (n. 4), December 1, 1974, §2.

Even though one of the contributions of post-Holocaust theology has been to hearken Christians back to Jewish voices regarding the interpretation of Scripture, the postulation that both Christians and Jews read essentially the same book but with two different names (Tanakh to Jews, Old Testament to Christians) is an oversimplification which skirts around the fact that for most of Christendom's history, the "Old" Testament was seen as having been fulfilled with the coming of the New. The "Old" Testament was (and largely is) read by Christians in a radically different way than the Tanakh is for Jews; Christians read the "Old" as *preparatio evangelica*—a preparation for the coming of Christ in the New Testament.³⁸ As stated in *Guidelines*, the dominant hermeneutical outlook is that the New Testament elicits the full meaning of the "Old," and both the "Old" and the New Testaments illumine and explain each other; Christians embrace "whatever in the Old Testament retains its own perpetual value."³⁹ Thus, in reading the Bible Christologically, Christians have generally seen Jesus as instituting a new, superior code of ethics in contrast to that of the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰

In an effort to bolster nodes of commonalities, the claim that both faiths see the "Old" Testament or Tanakh as authoritative distorts a number of critical points relating to how these books are read and interpreted within respective faith communities and how the Scriptures function as they shape religious identity. It discounts the reality that there is no monolithic perspective on these books; there never has been, nor should there ever be.⁴¹

³⁸ Furthermore, Christians interpret Scripture, to varying degrees, in conjunction with subsequent church councils, which are essential for defining Christian creedal statements, whereas for Jewish interpretation of Scripture, rabbinic texts such as the Mishnah and Gemara play a significant hermeneutical role.

³⁹ § II of *Guidelines*.

⁴⁰ Levenson critiques the way this facile assumption quickly glosses over complexities asking "how many Christians ask themselves, 'Are my morals in line with Torah?' They are more likely to ask, 'What would Jesus do?' (hence "WWJD" on bumper stickers, T-shirts, etc.). In fact, Christianity has usually considered Jesus' moral principles to be superior to those of the Torah, an improvement or radicalization and not just a restatement. Consider these examples from the Sermon on the Mount: You have heard that it was said [in the Decalogue], 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you: if a man looks on a woman with lust, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' [Exodus 21:24]. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." Jon D. Levenson, "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Commentary* 112:5, (2001), 34.

⁴¹ For example, the "Old" Testament for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians includes Jewish books that never attained the status of canonical within Rabbinic Judaism. The order of the books differs as well. The Tanakh ends with the decree of Cyrus in Chronicles granting Jews

E. The Complexities of Dialogue

One of the most common practical steps recommended in post-Holocaust statements is an increased dialogue between Christians and Jews, so they may learn from one another, heal from the wounds of the past, and begin to cultivate open relationships. Dialogue, however, is often recommended as a method by which to ascertain “what Jews and Christians have in common and what unites them.”⁴² If Christians approach dialogue as a stratagem for discovery analogousness, dialogical encounters become inherently averse to otherness. Authentic dialogue can only take place with a partner who does not want to conform the Other into his or her own image, but who understands that genuine dialogue necessitates difference. A considerable number of post-Holocaust ecclesial statements speak of the importance of authentic dialogue, which is in contrast to a monologue that imposes one’s own self-definitions on the Other. For example, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) describes dialogue as both “partners are able to define their faith in their own terms avoiding caricatures of one another.”⁴³ In a similar vein, the Anglican Lambeth Conference envisions dialogue as “mutual sharing,” explaining that “Dialogue does not require people to relinquish or alter their beliefs before entering into it; on the contrary, genuine dialogue demands that each partner brings to it the fullness of themselves and the tradition in which they stand.”⁴⁴ However, the notion that the purpose of dialogue is largely to unearth what Christians and Jews have in common is still a pervasive trend within post-Holocaust documents.

Berger and Patterson point out one of the difficulties of dialogue between Christians and Jews: it requires that both parties come together more or less on equal footing, which is “a veritable impossibility for Christians and Jews.”⁴⁵ The asymmetrical relationship between the two faiths must not be ignored. There are approximately 1 billion Christians worldwide and roughly 14 million Jews.⁴⁶ The relationship is also disproportionate because Christians bear the legacy of guilt on

permission to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple, whereas in the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi has the last word, predicting the arrival of the prophet Elijah and the coming of the Day of the Lord.

⁴² See *Church and Israel*, III.1.2.1.

⁴³ *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, § 12.

⁴⁴ *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, § 25.

⁴⁵ See *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey From the Rock*, Alan L. Berger and David Patterson, eds. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008), 170.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

account of the atrocities committed against Jews; this guilt far outweighs any culpability that Jews bear in relation to Christians. Dialogue is also inherently complex because Christians envision Jews and Judaism as essential to the very essence of their identity and faith; Judaism typically does not see Christianity as a necessity for their faith and self-conceptions in any significant way.⁴⁷

When viewed through the lens of otherness, dialogue is an opportunity for Jews and Christians (and many others who are welcomed to the table) to have their identity enriched by the encounter with the Other. When Christians and churches participate in dialogue, the desideratum should not be to synchronize diverse points of view for the sake of harmony, nor to “understand” the Other simply for the sake of conceptually mastering the Other (i.e. figuring the Other out so he or she can be kept at a safe distance). Rather, dialogue is envisioned as the cultivation of a safe space in which to embrace the Other qua Other, to deepen knowledge both of oneself and one’s own tradition, as well as intensify our experience of the Other. In this encounter, we do not demand that the Other relinquish anything in his or her own identity, nor do we seek some kind of artificial syntheses between two faiths based on perceived commonalities.

Mark Gammon points out how pervasive the tendency is “to take ‘dialogue’ a step too far—the danger being that Christianity’s distinctiveness from Judaism is downplayed to the point that the Christian’s ability to take a critical stance is severely hampered.”⁴⁸ In watering down Christian distinctiveness we lose something critical to the tradition. Didier Pollefeyt says,

Judaism and Christianity are not two sides of the same coin. They are two different coins. Hence, an authentic encounter between Jews and Christians does not simply depend on the overcoming of Christian anti-Judaism and Jewish animosity towards Christianity. It also depends on the abandonment of attempts to Christianize Judaism or Judaize Christianity.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid, 181.

⁴⁸ Mark E. Gammon, “Our Failure to React: Method in Christian Moral Theology After the Holocaust,” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, vol. 2 *Ethics and Religion*, John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 701.

⁴⁹ Didier Pollefeyt, *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search of an Alternative for the Theology of Substitution* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 6.

Eugene Fisher says of this dialogical encounter, “The sole goal, if there is one, is that Jews have the opportunity to become better Jews, and Christians more authentically founded in their Christianity.”⁵⁰ When the foundation of dialogue becomes a quest for commonalities instead of an embrace of differentiations, we not only lose an authentic part of ourselves, we lose the ability to discover, value, and welcome the Other, in all her or his terrifying strangeness.

F. Conclusion

This section has pointed to the problematic tendency within the Christian post-Holocaust landscape to accentuate the church’s special solidarity with the Jewish people as a prophylactic measure against the malady of antisemitism. In the most simplistic of terms, the narrative described here is that Christians lost sight of their shared spiritual heritage with the Jewish people, and this collective amnesia paved the way for Christian antisemitism culminating in the brutalities of the Holocaust. The prevention and cure lies in rediscovering Christianity’s Jewish roots once again in an effort to ensure that never again will Christianity turn its back on its Jewish roots or on its Jewish brothers and sisters. While the search for comity after centuries of hostilities is both a noble and necessary task, I have suggested that grounding this comity on purported Jewish-Christian commonalities is ultimately unsatisfying as a means to overcome negative Christian perceptions of Jews and to cultivate authentic space for otherness. In the pursuance of a nexus of spiritual heritage, deep-seated areas of religious and cultural divergence between Jews and Christians are considerably muted.

The steep cost of maintaining this shared Judeo-Christian tradition is that the self-definitions of neither Jews nor Christians are genuinely respected or preserved. This tendency leads to distortions, generalizations, and static, mythical definitions of Judaism and Jewish identity that are not consonant with Jewish self-conceptions, but must be upheld nevertheless for the preservation of Christian identity. The risk is that new stereotypes that are seemingly more benign are perpetuated to replace the old

⁵⁰ The Way of Dialogue, in Id & Klenicki, *Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Vatican II Declaration Nostra Aetate (No. 4) on Catholic-Jewish Relations: Programs and Resources* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1985), 17.

ones. This renewed emphasis on Jewish-Christian solidarity has the potential to exacerbate a rejection of otherness by essentially eradicating the otherness of the Other and replacing it with familiarity.

It is apparent that the trajectory of Jewish-Christian dialogue since the Holocaust has been to make Jews and Christians less “Other” to one another. While it may be reasonable to assert that Christians and Jews share a host of common spiritual traits and values, can these commonalities really be a solid foundation for the prevention of genocide, in light of the increasingly pluralistic context in which we are situated? The tenor here seems to be that otherness is a problem that needs to be solved, an obstacle that needs to be overcome. This tenor betrays that too often the Other is approached as someone to be changed into one in whom I can recognize myself. In our post-Holocaust context rife with the proliferation of otherness, to what degree are Christian churches equipped to tolerate otherness, to engage with the Other, or even to embrace the Other?

Furthermore, when the quest for unity between Christians and Jews is built upon a foundation of commonalities, this has significant implications for our understanding of the church’s solidarity with people of other religions (or with those who are non-religious.) Does the insistence that Christians need Jews for their very spiritual survival imply that Christianity can largely do without other people groups, with whom it does not share such intimate links of spiritual identity? Should the preservation of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Sikh, or the atheist (to offer but a few examples) also be equally critical for Christian and ecclesial identity? What is our responsibility as churches toward the one with whom we are *least likely to identify with*, the one with whom we can find no modicum of commonality? What are the churches’ moral and ethical obligations to those with whom it shares no common roots, to those people it does not *need* for the cultivation of religious identity, and to those who are even more otherized than the Jewish people?

Practically, the tendency within post-Holocaust theology to emphasize commonalities as a foundation for solidarity ineluctably sends the message that the future prevention of genocide lies in the cultivation of theological mutuality; thus assimilation and compromise seem to be the best guarantor against becoming an undesirable Other. Would not the post-Holocaust church be on much firmer ground

if built upon a commitment to accepting, protecting, and embracing the Other, instead of seeking to construct solidarity upon the tenuous foundation of familiarity? In a post-Holocaust world, more fraught than ever with a rejection of otherness, such a question cannot be ignored.

II. PERPETUATION OF THE WITNESS PEOPLE MYTH

The previous section highlighted how the emphasis on rediscovering Jewish-Christian commonalities is a problematic notion for the post-Holocaust church because of the tendency to camouflage otherness in the pursuit of commonalities, and because of the potential to enervate the churches' bonds of solidarity with those who are radically other, with whom no such spiritual heritage can be retrieved. This section will explore a homologous thread which pervades the post-Holocaust theological landscape—the tendency to ascribe Jews a functional, mythical-religious status in the Christian narrative of redemption, albeit a much more “positive” status than throughout much of Christian history.

Stephen Haynes says, “Post-Holocaust theological reflection that begins with a recognition of common spiritual paternity almost inevitably issues in a reiteration of Christian mythology regarding the Jews.”⁵¹ Hannah Holtschneider reflects a similar concern asking,

Has the confession of a common ground and future of Christians and Jews really helped to eliminate antisemitism from Christian thinking or has it substituted one model of thinking about Jews with another, which again does not take seriously Jewish self-expression? Are Jews considered as people in their own right or only as symbols in Christian understandings of salvation history?⁵²

This section will (1) briefly discuss the prevalence of the so-called “witness people myth” embedded within Christian theological reflections before and after the Holocaust, (2) build on the work of Stephen Haynes and Hannah Holtschneider to

⁵¹ Haynes, “Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity,” in *“Good News” After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 10.

⁵² *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Fundamentaltheologische Studien 24, Lit. Verlag, Münster, 2001), 61.

note some problematic implications of witness people thinking for Jewish-Christian relations and, (3) discuss the difficulties which imposed narratives pose on a broader level for an authentic with the Other.

A. The Witness People Myth

Haynes claims “Jews must always be special cases in products of Christian imagination, because of the uniquely ambivalent place which the Jewish people inhabit there.”⁵³ He describes the witness people myth as “a specific set of beliefs, assumptions and convictions about Jews that have been expressed consistently by Christians over the centuries.”⁵⁴ Haynes builds on Richard Rubenstein’s observation that “it may be impossible for [most] Christians to remain Christians without regarding Jews in mythic, magic, and theological categories.”⁵⁵

The witness people myth holds that whatever fate befalls the Jewish people—it is God’s sovereign justice; whether they endure blessing or curse, their existence constitutes a unique witness for the church. Thus, because Jews are actors on the stage of world history playing a role that no other people group can perform, Jews are conceived of in terms of “signs” or “witnesses,” rather than as normal people. Christians cannot help but think of Jews in this way because witness-people thinking is intrinsic to Christian identity. It is a structure deeply ensconced within the Christian imagination and is often pre-critical and unconscious.⁵⁶ Holtschneider says, the witness people myth “is the uniting narrative of the churches with regard to the interpretation of Jewish history;” it operates as “the vehicle that carries the collective memory of Christians in their relation to Jews and Judaism.”⁵⁷

B. History of the Myth

The witness people myth evolved from attempts to solve theologically the apparent dilemma of the enduring survival of the Jewish people after the coming of Christ, as

⁵³ Stephen Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination*, 3.

⁵⁴ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 9

⁵⁵ Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 56.

⁵⁶ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 36.

well as to explain the collective trials and tribulations of the Jews. This concept received its most explicit and enduring expression in the writings of Augustine, who described the perpetual misfortunes of the Jews as providential.⁵⁸ He declared,

They [i.e. the Jews] are at once witnesses of evil and Christian truth...they subsist “for the salvation of the nation but not for their own.” They witness by their Scriptures...and by their dispersion and their woes. Like Cain they carry a sign but are not to be killed.⁵⁹

Augustine spoke of a remnant of Jews who will “survive but not thrive” existing as “witnesses to the prophecies which were given beforehand [i.e. before Christ’s coming] concerning Christ.”⁶⁰ Thus, the predominant conception in Christendom and through the modern era was the Augustinian witness people formula, which essentially granted Jews license to subsist but never to flourish—because their adverse fortune was necessary to substantiate the triumphalist claims of Christianity. Paldiel illustrates how deeply this ethos was intertwined with Christian identity:

It became imperatively necessary for the edification of the faithful that the Jewish people as a whole be proven fundamentally evil, unworthy, laden with crimes, opprobrium and maledictions. Thus began the elaboration of a theology which became wedded to Christian thinking up to the modern period; of the Jews as both a criminal and a witness people; wretched witnesses ‘of their own iniquity and of our truth...These anti-Jewish fulminations were not simply peripheral and accidental, but woven into the core of the Christian message, right up to the Holocaust.’⁶¹

Witness people thinking thus hinges on dual theological claims: first, the Jews *must* be preserved—they cannot vanish as actors in the Christian drama of redemption because they function as a living emblem of God’s sovereignty. Second, Jewish dispersion and persecution testify to the validity and superiority of Christianity and bespeak God’s word of judgment on Judaism as a disobedient,

⁵⁸ Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, 50.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Stephen Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 223.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, Henry Bettenson, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1972), book XVIII, ch. 45, 828. Citation found in James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 216-217.

⁶¹ Mordecai Paldiel, *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans and Reconciliation*, (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing, 2006), 13-14.

defunct faith.⁶² Thus, Edward Flannery says of the Jews, “They are at once witnesses of evil and of Christian truth.”⁶³

C. Witness People Thinking in Post-Holocaust Christian Theology

Through his analysis of ecclesial statements and the work of so-called Holocaust theologians, Haynes trenchantly detects that witness people thinking is the dominant approach which Christians have toward the Jewish people, both historically and contemporarily. The penchant to view Jews through a “mythological camera”⁶⁴ has not changed since the Holocaust, although considerable revisions have taken place to ensure that Jews are described much more optimistically than throughout much of Church history.

When Jews are cast into the role of unique witnesses to God’s work in the world, regardless of whether this role is ostensibly positive or negative, they become susceptible to the “unnatural expectations, religious projections, and irrational fantasies” of non-Jews.⁶⁵ Haynes describes how perilous this tendency is for the Jewish people,

The witness-people myth in all its modern and pre-modern versions spells danger for the Jewish people...Jewish security is threatened whenever real Jews are associated with the “Jew” of the Christian imagination. Thus even apparently positive or philosemitic aspects of Christian thought cannot operate in the interest of Jews as long as they are rooted in mythology.⁶⁶

⁶² Rubenstein says, “After the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, the rabbis interpreted that event as God’s punishment for Israel’s failing to keep the commandments. Christian thinkers of the same period agreed that the destruction of Jerusalem was divine punishment, but they argued that the rejection of Jesus as Lord and Messiah was God’s motive for allowing the Romans to lay waste Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. According to their interpretations, the Jew could regain God’s favor only by truly embracing the Christian faith. As long as the Jews refused, God would condemn them to the suffering, humiliation, and indignity of exile. The suffering of the ‘witness people’ was thus understood as a confirmation of the Christian faith, and Jews were seen as justly paying a bitter price for their refusal to accept the truth as understood by Christianity.” In *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 20.

⁶³ Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, 50. Donald Dietrich confirms this notion saying, “At least theologically, traditional Christians viewed the Jewish religion as an anachronism, for the Incarnation and the ‘new’ covenant had made it superfluous and robbed the Jewish community of its reason for existence, except as the Augustinian remnant people useful for Christian pedagogical purposes.” In *God and Humanity in Auschwitz*, 140.

⁶⁴ Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity” in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 11.

⁶⁵ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 182.

⁶⁶ Ibid. In connection with his claim that the witness people myth, regardless of its variegations, denotes danger for the Jewish people. Haynes asks, “What happens when Jews do not fulfill the role set for them in the Christian mind?” See “Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust

While many church statements articulate the importance of understanding Jews and their Judaism on their own terms, Jews are understood in these documents from a variety of approaches, primarily in terms of theological abstractions. “The Jew” and Judaism are envisioned as static fixtures, indispensable for the construction of Christian self-understanding. To reiterate a few examples, the 1967 report *The Church and the Jewish People* says, [God] “chose this particular people to be the bearer of a particular promise and to act as his covenant-partner and special instrument.” The statement says that in this way, the Jewish people might become, “a living revelation to others.” It is by virtue of their miraculous persistence that Jews are described as ‘living and visible sign of God’s faithfulness to men.’⁶⁷ The 1980 Rhineland Statement stressed “the continuing existence of the Jewish people, its return to the Land of Promise, and also the creation of the state of Israel, are signs of the faithfulness of God toward his people.”⁶⁸ The Roman Catholic statement *We Remember* describes the Jews’ faithfulness to the God of Israel and the Torah as a “unique witness.”⁶⁹ Of Jewish suffering it says, their “terrible fate has become a symbol of the aberrations of which man is capable when he turns against God.”⁷⁰ Likewise, Holocaust education should,

Christianity,” in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Macon: Mercer University Press: 2001), 11.

⁶⁷ Sherman, *Bridges*, 273.

⁶⁸ Likewise, the 1987 statement by the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) says in point 2, “The continued existence of the Jewish people and of the church as communities elected by God is, as the apostle Paul expressed it, a ‘mystery’ (Romans 11:25).”

⁶⁹ The document, *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See’s We Remember*, which was published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB 2001) continues to use the language of Witness People when describing the Jewish people. It says, “The Shoah was neither a random act of mass murder nor simply the result of a war or ancient enmity between two peoples (as most other genocides have been). It was a war against the Jews as the People of God, the First Witnesses to God’s Revelation and the eternal bearers of that witness through all the centuries since.” (USCCB 2001, 3)

⁷⁰ *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. Christopher Leighton argues that the problem of dictating the role Jews will play in the Christian narrative actually begins much earlier. *Nostra Aetate* claims, “The Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself” (*Nostra Aetate*, § 4). Leighton says this declaration betrays both ambiguity and triumphalism in proclaiming that the Church’s preaching is to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s faithfulness. “The enduring problem emerges yet again: Jews find themselves cast in a subordinate role within the grand Christian narrative. They are present at the beginning of the Christian story, and they will be claimed in the end. But in the meantime, they are simply an indispensable and eternal witness to somebody else’s saving truth, a truth that ultimately they need to recognize as their own.” See “Christianity Theology After the Shoah” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 42. Cardinal Bea, the moving spirit behind *Nostra Aetate*, stated that the Jewish people “is no longer the people of God in the sense of an institution for the salvation of mankind...Its function in preparing the Kingdom of God is finished with the advent of Christ and the founding of

encourage a positive appreciation of Jews and Judaism and the *ongoing role* of the Jewish People in God's plan of salvation. This role, the Church teaches, was not exhausted in preparing the way for and giving birth to Jesus. It will continue until the end of time.⁷¹

Stephen Haynes points out how ecclesial statements employ witness people terminology and concepts in "a remarkably consistent way."⁷² While there is much to appreciate in these labors to reform Christianity in the shadow of Christian animus towards Jews, these documents tend to regurgitate the conventional Christian viewpoint regarding the Jews, couched in more positive and conciliatory terms. This is particularly evidenced by ubiquitous references to "Israel" in terms of salvation history, covenant and election, uniqueness, divine calling, and the "mystery" of Jewish survival.

Resultantly, even when Christian theological reflection succeeds in obliterating historic anti-Judaism, it risks reiterating the same mythological concepts that militate against Jews being seen in normal terms. In particular, post-Holocaust Christian theology continues to be plagued by the tendency to place special demands upon the Jews.⁷³ This is why Haynes contends that witness people thinking is a "mythical complex more ambivalent and more subtle in its pernicious influence than pure Jew-hatred."⁷⁴ The unparalleled role Jews play in the Christian schema makes it

the church." Henry Siegman "A Decade of Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Reassessment," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (1978), 258-259.

⁷¹ *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See's 'We Remember' Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2001), §B,2. In a similar manner, while prompting Christians to repudiate all forms of antisemitism and to value and love the Jewish people as the permanent chosen people of God, *Notes* goes on to speak in Witness People terms saying of the Jews, they "have been chosen by God to prepare the coming of Christ and have preserved everything that was progressively revealed and given in the course of that preparation, notwithstanding their difficulty in recognizing in Him their Messiah (§ I.8).

⁷² Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 174. Holocaust theologians also fall prey to this tendency. For example, A. Roy Eckardt sees Judaism as serving a peculiar purpose in the divine economy, that of "testifying against paganism on behalf of a universal God of justice." Therefore, he avers that conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity would be warranted solely if it could be proved the Jewish people have ceased to perform this specific mission. Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown Press, 1948), 416.

⁷³ Here, Haynes points specifically to Paul van Buren work and claims such as the "Jews are not free to be other than God's elect people." There are "remnants of a powerful Christian ideology which 'fabricates abnormal obligations for Jews.'" Stephen Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 271.

⁷⁴ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 7.

virtually impossible for those ensconced in the Christian tradition to conceptualize Jews in terms other than static and mythical-religious. Haynes explains,

When Christians are confronted by the word-sign “Jew,” they are more likely to conjure theological types and anti-types, not to mention cultural and literally stereotypes, than to think of real individuals with the same hopes, failures and foibles as non-Jews... The crux of the Christian outlook is that every Jew, whether they are cast in an angelic or demonic role, is part of a chosen race that in some mysterious way represents God.⁷⁵

Even those theologians and scholars toiling assiduously to rehabilitate the relationship between Christians and Jews remain “quite unaware of the myth’s presences in their own discourse”⁷⁶ says Haynes. Thus, in spite of the commendable changes transpiring within post-Holocaust theology in recent decades, an examination of official church documents reveals that “the theological grid through which Christian theologians view the Jewish people has in fact not been shattered by the Holocaust.”⁷⁷

Through her analysis of three theological reflections on the Holocaust by German Protestants,⁷⁸ Holtschneider echoes a number of Hayne’s concerns about the propensity within post-Holocaust Christian theology to imagine Jews and Judaism as reified concepts that exists solely on Christian terms. Holtschneider asks, “Are Jews considered as people in their own right or only as symbols in Christian understandings of salvation history?”⁷⁹ Speaking especially of second generation German Protestant theologies which address the Holocaust, she notes that the typical hermeneutical method is to instrumentalize Jews and see their chief function as “signs” of God’s action in human history. Perceptible within the work of German Protestant theologians, and in the wider landscape of European and North American Holocaust theology as well, is the propensity for Christians to dictate religious

⁷⁵ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 5-6.

⁷⁶ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 7.

⁷⁷ Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 174.

⁷⁸ Holtschneider’s work reflects specifically on two second generation texts: the 1980 Rhineland Statement and Marquardt’s *Von Elend und Heimsuchung der Theologie*, as well as one third generation scholar, Britta Jüngst’s doctoral dissertation, *Auf der Seite des Todes das Leben*. See *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory* (Fundamentaltheologische Studien 24, Münster: Lit. Verlag Münster, 2001).

⁷⁹ Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 61.

identities and ignore Jewish self-conceptions as valid in their own right. These works pursue a renewed shared heritage between Christians and Jews, which is perceived as a solid basis for a friendship and an opportunity to learn from Jews. Holtschneider observes,

Portraying Jews in terms of “witness-people thinking” and casting Jews immediately in the role of teachers of Christians obscures Jewish self-understandings in their own right, because Jewish identities cannot be recognized beyond their role as witnesses to an exemplary human relationship with G-d and teachers of Christians.⁸⁰

While fashioning Jews in a positive role as teachers is conceived as a sharp reversal from traditional *adversus Judaeos* theology, it remains imbued with problematic implications for encountering the Jewish Other. Holtschneider highlights the danger “of fashioning ‘the Jew’ in terms unrelated to Jewish self-understanding, thus forcing Jews to define themselves if not as, then at least in relation to, ‘the Jew’ of antisemitism.”⁸¹

Whereas a dependency of Christians on Jews was traditionally understood as a hindrance and a relationship the church would rather relinquish, but could not, Christian dependency on Jews is now elevated to a virtue and is understood to be of primary significance to Christian faith.⁸²

Thus, after the Holocaust, the witness people myth remains unscathed, but as Holtschneider explains, “it has been turned inside out and the negative connotations have been invested with positive meaning.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 197.

⁸¹ See “Jean Améry Memories of Evil and Consequences for the Representation of Jewish Identity in Christian Theology” in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, David Patterson and John K. Roth eds. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 44.

⁸² Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 51.

⁸³ Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 36.

D. The Holocaust and Witness People Thinking

Both Holtschneider and Haynes critique the impact of witness people thinking on Christian perceptions of the Holocaust. The contention in post-Holocaust theology that the Holocaust is *sui generis* is intimately linked to and animated by the witness people myth. The Holocaust is unique in the course of human history because of the church's "wholesale apostasy"⁸⁴ vis-à-vis the destruction of God's witness people—the Jews. The argument for the uniqueness of the Holocaust thus betrays the tendency to envision Jews in special, mythological categories.

Concomitantly, witness-people thinking undergirds many claims about the revelatory nature of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is perceived as a message for the church, proclaiming the dire consequences of threatening the existence of God's witness people. Thus, says Haynes, "Jewish history, Jewish survival, and the Jews themselves are superlative symbols of Christian apostasy."⁸⁵ Rubenstein and Roth point out how susceptible even non-religious people are to witness-people thinking when it comes to the Holocaust,

It is possible, for instance, for Christians to view the Armenian genocide or the Pol Pot massacres in Cambodia as a purely secular events, without raising the question of whether transcendent religious meaning involving "chosen people" is at stake. Not so the Holocaust—almost inevitably it elicits some form of religious interpretation or inquiry, even among many people who are not particularly "religious."⁸⁶

Because the Holocaust symbolizes the attempt to annihilate the Jews systematically, it is understood as an event that directly imperils the validity of the Christian faith. Holtschneider notes the inclination within post-Holocaust Christian narratives to "Christianise" the Holocaust, emanating from the need for the church to develop a new self-understanding and collective memory concerning Jews and Judaism.⁸⁷ Because the Holocaust is envisioned as an event that threatens the future of Christianity in the same way as it imperiled Jewish survival, the theological spotlight moves away from Jews as victims of the Holocaust and instead is shined on

⁸⁴ Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 1.

⁸⁵ Haynes continues, "Thus, Holocaust theology reinvests Jews with the unique signifying function they have so often possessed in the Christian imagination." *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell*, 79.

⁸⁶ *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 20.

⁸⁷ Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 35-36.

the problematic ramifications of the Holocaust for the future credibility of the Christian faith.

Holtzman says the dominant question the churches grapple with in response to the Holocaust is, “What does the Holocaust mean to us Christians? No what has it done to Jews?”⁸⁸ In an effort to define aspects of the Christian faith that were shattered by the Holocaust, Christians have relocated Jews to the epicenter of their theology. In doing so, they must rely on certain assumptions about Jewish peoplehood and Jewish religious identities that are considered immutable and normative.⁸⁹ When “The Jews” are seen as crucial for Christian identity and Christian redemption, they are reified into a static fixture, indispensable for to the very foundation of Christian self-understanding. Once positioned into this role, removing, altering, or replacing “The Jew” becomes potentially precarious for Christian identity.

Holtzman notes that many post-Holocaust suppositions about Jews risk unintentionally ignoring Jewish self conceptions before, during, and after the Holocaust.⁹⁰ Even though Jews have been repositioned to the center of post-Holocaust theology, contemporary religious expressions of Judaism receive little attention. She elaborates,

The need of Christians, after the Holocaust shattered Christian self-understanding, to reconstruct their identities is greater than their need to listen to the “Jewish other” and acknowledge Jews’ experiences and interpretations of the Holocaust, in particular where these might challenge and oppose the Christian need for reassurance and for reconstruction of faith and identity.⁹¹

Because of the problematic assumptions related to the contention that the Christian-Jewish relationship is *sui generis*, Holtzman concludes “only in

⁸⁸ Holtzman, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 37.

⁸⁹ Holtzman, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 35-36.

⁹⁰ Holtzman, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 35. Christopher Leighton voices a related concern. “The anguished history that mandates a radical realignment within the Christian tradition also threatens to freeze Christians and Jews into a rigid script that confines Christians to the roles of perpetrators and bystanders and Jews to the backdrop of victims.” *Quoted in Christianity in Jewish Terms*, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, et al. eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 43.

⁹¹ Holtzman, *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, 57-8.

establishing a viable Christian identity independent of Jews will Christians be able to reflect theologically on Jewish traditions and identities in a non-imperialistic manner.”⁹² Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether voice a similar call for the normalization of the Jewish people vis-à-vis Christianity, arguing that Jews should be enabled to live as ordinary, secular human beings and nothing else:

As long as the Christian community tried to make Israel something special, to trumpet forth that Israel has obligations greater than or different from those of other human beings, the burden of the Christian past will not be lifted.⁹³

The challenge issued here is for Christian communities to articulate their own stories disentangled from the need to define Judaism and Jewish identity for their own purposes. Christians need to cultivate their identities and stories contextually, in dialogue with the real, living Jewish community (as well as with a host of others) and free from monologue with the static “Jew” that we find in much of post-Holocaust theology.

E. Mythic Othering

The work of Haynes and Holtschneider exposes that the witness people myth is a perennial proclivity within Christian reflections on Jews and Judaism. It is a complex *mélange* of assertions and expectations about the Jewish people that is, arguably, inextricable from Christian identity, as least as Christian identity is traditionally conceived. While neither Haynes nor Holtschneider proffer any simplistic solutions for excising witness-people thinking from Christian theology, they both identify the hazards when “the Jew” is cast into an indispensable role in Christian self-conception. The intractable nature of the witness people myth within Christian theology is substantiated by the fact that even those theologians and scholars working tirelessly toward a transformed relationship with the Jewish people still tend to sift their theological reflections, however unconsciously, through the filter of conventional witness-people thinking.

⁹² Holtschneider, *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust*, 199.

⁹³ In *The Wrath of Jonah, The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Fortress Press, 2002), 106.

While cognizant of the particularities and complexities of the witness people myth for the relationship between Christians and Jews, there are also broader implications which can be discerned here for Christian churches concerning the way the Other is encountered and envisaged. Chapter one pointed out some perils when encountering the Other, particularly the temptation to approach the Other simply as a blank slate waiting to be transcribed, a *tabula rasa*, without his or her own story, identity, and history.⁹⁴ The susceptibility to mythologize the Other, which Henry Knight has coined “Mythic Othering”, is an essential ingredient in the ideology of otherization and poises a tremendous risk for Christian encounters with otherness.⁹⁵

Knight illustrates this tendency by pointing to the biblical figure of Amalek, a figure who is imbued with mythical, nefarious dimensions.⁹⁶ Knight carefully explicates the dangers inherent in mythologizing the Other, regardless of whether the narrative of the myth is construed as fundamentally optimistic, benign, or negative:

Mythic identification of any living other is problematic. Even if the mythologization were all positive, the dynamics of myth-making sever the human connections with the other, rendering him or her beyond the pale of shared moral obligations...Once that happens, anyone so identified loses his or her claims of shared humanity with anyone else, becoming superfluous to the moral calculus employed to work out appropriate strategies of survival in critical times.⁹⁷

When Christians participates in mythic othering, whether of an individual or a people group, the particularities of identity are obliterated; the Other is diminished to a mere cipher. Knight says that mythic othering “voids the humanity of the other with whom we interact...the other is idealized and disappears as a real human being

⁹⁴ See Denise Ackermann, “Becoming Fully Human,” 15.

⁹⁵ Henry F. Knight, “Coming to Terms with Amalek: Testing the Limits of Hospitality,” in *Confronting Genocide*, 233.

⁹⁶ He says, “Who then is Amalek? Amalek is the other who opposes Israel (and any of us who identify with Israel) so viciously, so completely, so utterly that he/she opposes not just Israel (or those who identify with Israel) but God and God’s intentions for life and all creation. Amalek is that other whom my hospitality will never be able to make welcome in the world because Amalek is that other whom hospitality cannot welcome because Amalek’s identity denies the validity of hospitality even when it welcomes Amalek.” Henry F. Knight, “Coming to Terms with Amalek: Testing the Limits of Hospitality,” in *Confronting Genocide*, 230.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

with faults and foibles.”⁹⁸ Even when the Other is construed in positive terms (e.g. philosemitism, romanticizing, xenophilia, etc.), mythic othering subverts the ability to have a genuine encounter with the Other. Instead, the Other is approached as a blank canvas upon which all sorts of prejudices, misconceptions, and expectations can be painted. The Other becomes particularly vulnerable, especially when he or she fails to live up to the imposed demands and expectations that are placed upon him or her. When the particularities of identity disappear from view and the story of the Other is dictated rather than permitted to be told, the humanity of the Other becomes distorted and eclipsed.

F. Conclusion

If even those most committed to cultivating positive conceptions of Jews and Judaism are not immune to this hegemonic tendency to mythologize the Other, this inclination is one which Christian churches simply cannot ignore. The problem of imposing a narrative on an individual or group and dictating the role they will play in the Christian story seems to get at the heart of the problem of a rejection of otherness for the churches. How do ecclesial communities even begin to resist the penchant to mythologize the Other? While there are no easy answers that avoid an erasure of otherness, it is hoped that the subsequent two chapters on identity and ecclesiology might offer some modest, constructive suggestions toward recognizing and even embracing the intrinsic beauty and worth of the Other, without trying to dictate his or her role in the Christian story.

III. QUESTIONS RAISED BY NON-JEWISH VICTIMS

This chapter has explored two dominant trends that emerge from a reflection upon the post-Holocaust theological landscape. A final pattern, or rather omission, that can be observed here is the reticence regarding non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, particularly concerning why the churches also did not stand up for others who were deemed to be unfortunate expendables within the Third Reich. Carol Rittner says,

⁹⁸ Knight, “Coming to Terms with Amalek,” 228-229.

If one calculates all the civilian casualties—not including those killed as part of the systemic mass murder, nor those who died as accidental victims of battles, air raids, and military operations, but only those categorized as subhumans and killed as a result of conscious persecution—the result is staggering.⁹⁹

As noted, commendable strides have been made within ecclesial statements and Holocaust scholarship to contend with the cancer of antisemitism embedded within the Christian tradition. While in no way trying to mitigate Christianity's responsibility for spawning anti-Judaism, nor the unique features of the systematic persecution of Jews, this section aims to portray the narrative of the "mosaic of victims"¹⁰⁰ who were not Jewish, but who were nevertheless destroyed in the maw of the Nazi killing machine. George Schultz remarks,

When the attention of civilized humanity has been focused and rightly so on the unprecedented Nazi murder of six million European Jews...the acts of unspeakable evil committed by Nazi Germany against non-Jewish people also deserve to be studied, to be condemned, and above all to be remembered.¹⁰¹

Berenbaum also speaks of the significance of studying non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust saying "Only by understanding the fate of others who suffered, where it paralleled the Jewish experience and more importantly where it differed, can the distinctive character of the Jewish fate as a matter of historical fact be demonstrated."¹⁰²

Questions pertaining to the churches' failure to succor non-Jewish victims have generally gone unasked and unanswered in post-Holocaust Christian theology. I suggest that in diagnosing antisemitism as the primary factor that lulled the conscience of the churches to Nazi atrocities, Christian theology has, by and large, evaded a more intensive critique of the churches' languid response towards the

⁹⁹ Carol Rittner, *Mosaic of Victims*, xii.

¹⁰⁰ I am indebted to Michael Berenbaum for this phrase. See Berenbaum ed. *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Murdered and Persecuted by the Nazis* (New York University Press, 1992).

¹⁰¹ George Schultz, "Remarks" (Delivered at the conference, "The Other Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis," United States Department of State, Washington, DC, 1979, mimeographed), no. 45 February 23, 1987.

¹⁰² Michael Berenbaum, quoted by Carol Rittner, "Foreward: The Triumph of Memory," in *Mosaic of Victims*, Michael Berenbaum ed., xiv.

destruction of millions of other non-Jewish victims.¹⁰³ A tragic lacuna exists within post-Holocaust reflections in response to the question of why the churches were also largely silent toward the persecution of Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, communists, Czechs, homosexuals, the mentally and physically disabled, Poles, political opponents, Russians, Serbs, Socialists, trade unionists, Ukrainians, Yugoslavians, and numerous others who were considered expendable.

The purpose of this section will not be to offer a comprehensive account of non-Jewish victims, nor an extensive report of ecclesiastical responses but rather, (1) to draw attention to the consistent pattern of ecclesial silence vis-à-vis the persecution and extermination of a host of vulnerable others and (2) to inquire if perhaps an impulse other than antisemitism can be discerned here. I will contend that lurking beneath the surface of the historical narrative of the churches' response to non-Jewish victims is the pathology of a rejection of otherness—not simply the Jewish Other, but numerous manifestations of otherness were seen as dwelling beyond the bounds of the churches' moral obligation. Thus, a rejection of otherness will be the lens that will guide the following account.

A. Outsiders in the Nazi Regime

To be different in Nazi Germany was to be in a position of grave peril. The essence of Nazi ideology was *Gleichschaltung*, a process that would systematically align all German people into a new social order; all individuals and groups that deviated from this new norm were to be silenced, assimilated, or eliminated. Gordan Zahn offers a

¹⁰³ Works on non-Jewish victims which were helpful for this study include: Frank Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981); Richard S. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1988); Linda Jacobs Altman, *The Forgotten Victims of the Holocaust* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 2003); Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Günter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995); Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986); Hans Hesse, ed., *Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses During the Nazi Regime, 1933-1945* (Bremen, Germany: Edition Temmen, 2001); Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Horst Biesold *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1999); Michael Burleigh *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Heinz Heger, *Men With Pink Triangles: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps* (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Publications, 1980); and Hans J. Massaquoi *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

useful threefold categorization of victims of the Nazi regime. The first category was those who were victimized because of *what they were* in terms of genetic (or to a lesser degree cultural) origins. The Jews would be placed here— because they were defined as the quintessential “anti-race.” Other groups, most notably the Gypsies also belonged to this designation as well, regarded as “human refuse suitable only for extermination.” Also slotted here were “lesser races” such as Slavs who, although not necessarily unworthy of existence in the Reich could still be “put to use” in the Nazi schema.¹⁰⁴ A second category of outsiders became victims because of *what they did*. Here would be those who violated conventional moral values (such as homosexuals) as well as those whose crimes were of a political nature. Finally, some became victims because of what they *refused to do*, such as those who refused military service (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses) or those refused to comply with orders they considered unethical.¹⁰⁵

The concatenation between Jew-hatred and Nazi antipathy towards other victimized groups was the increasing Nazi obsession with pseudoscientific notions of race, heredity, and breeding.¹⁰⁶ Hitler’s desideratum was the cultivation of a race of *Übermenschen*, a race boasting superiority physically, militarily, culturally, and intellectually. Hence, the veritable centerpiece of Nazi ideology was the belief that there were insurmountable differences between races and that breeding betwixt “inferior races” and the superior Aryan race would result in the attenuation and ultimately desecration of the true German *Volk*. David Gushee underscores this ideology stating, “In the Nazi scheme, a primordial ontological gulf existed between groups of people, one that fundamentally affected their relative worth.”¹⁰⁷ The aim of Nazi eugenics was to develop the Germanic *Übermenschen* through the neutralization and elimination of subhuman pollutants who were weakening the nation’s bloodstream. Donald Dietrich states, “The establishment of this *Volksgemeinschaft* would mean the eradication of those who could not enter this

¹⁰⁴ Gordon Zahn, “Pacifists in the Third Reich” in Michael Berenbaum ed. *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Murdered and Persecuted by the Nazis* (New York University Press, 1992), 194. Zahn admits that, as with most categorizations, this breakdown cannot exist in perfectly neat categories, as many individuals under Hitler were ostracized based on several overlapping categories.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Donald Bloxham *The Final Solution: A Genocide*, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 141.

¹⁰⁷ David Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 132.

utopia.”¹⁰⁸ The inferior Other, those the Reich characterized as *Abschaum der Nation* (the refuse of the nation), would have to be systematically weeded out.

1. THE FATE OF THE ROMA AND SINTI

Persecution of the so-called Gypsies¹⁰⁹ actually began years before the Nazis came to power in Germany. Like antisemitism, Gypsy-hatred was an enduring and familiar ethos within Europe.¹¹⁰ The peripatetic lifestyle of Roma and Sinti people, their unconventional livelihood, and their unusual dress ostracized them from the Germany society and made them vulnerable to persecution by the civil authorities. The Nazis declared the Gypsies to be asocial deviants and “work-shy” criminals. The 1933 Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases specifically targeted Gypsies for sterilization as a preventative measure. As early as 1933, holding places of detention were created to quarantine Gypsies from the rest of the population and by 1934 Gypsies were being corralled in closed camping areas.¹¹¹ In 1935, when the Nuremberg racial Laws were enacted, Nazi officials declared that the Nuremberg legislation should be applied to Gypsies as well as to Jews, since both were deemed to be “carriers of alien blood.” Gypsies, in tandem with Jews, were stripped of their rights as citizens and forfeited the right to vote in Reichstag

¹⁰⁸ “Catholic Resistance or Racist Eugenics” In *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich. Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffmann*, Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes, eds. (Berg, New York, 1990), 137-138.

¹⁰⁹ Gypsies and its German equivalent *Zigeuner* actually refers to two distinct people groups: the Roma and the Sinti. Originally from the Punjab region of northern India, they came to Germany in the late fifteenth century and maintained a distinctive culture and itinerant lifestyle. It is important to note that many Roma and Sinti do not accept the collective term “Gypsies” which was used pejoratively over many years to stereotype them negatively and obliterate the diversity of their identity. This term is preserved here simply because it is commonly used within scholarly discourse.

¹¹⁰ Roma and Sinti people were cruelly persecuted from the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century; during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Germany and a number of other European countries imposed restrictions on where they could travel, where they could settle and their contact with those outside the Gypsy community. For example, the 1926 Bavarian “Law for Combatting Gypsies, Vagabonds and Work-Shy” was expanded throughout other German states in 1929 to greatly constrain the Gypsies’ freedom of movement and their options for professions, despite the fact that these restrictions contradicted the constitution of the Weimar Republic. (See John Connolly, “Gypsies, Homosexuals, and Slavs” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 275.

¹¹¹ “Circles of Hell: Jewish and Non-Jewish Victims of the Nazis,” Mary Johnson and Carol Rittner, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 548, The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future. (1996), 126.

elections in March of 1936.¹¹² By 1936, thousands of Gypsies had been deported to Dachau, Germany's first concentration camp for political and social enemies of the state, as well as to Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. Like Jews, Gypsies were racially classified, dispossessed, deported, ghettoized, and ultimately slated for annihilation.¹¹³ While no one knows the precise number of Gypsies living in Europe in 1939, Sybil Milton estimates that in 1933 there were around 35,000 Roma and Sinti living in Germany (.05% of the population of approximately 65 million Germans).¹¹⁴ Because the Gypsies were not deemed suitable for life in the new German Volk, the Nazis determined to exterminate them—these measures would be extended to entire families, including children—even to those who had been settled in Germany for several generations.¹¹⁵

In early 1942, Gypsies were deported from the Reich-occupied territory to Ghettos, particularly the Lodz ghetto. They were also some of the first victims of the mobile gas vans at the Chelmno killing center in German-occupied Poland. Robert Jay Lifton describes how SS doctors, particularly the infamous medical doctor Josef Mengele, practiced many ruthless scientific experiments on Gypsies. At Birkenau, twins, dwarfs, giants, and others considered abnormal or deformed were sadistically tortured under the guise of “medical research.”¹¹⁶ Yehuda Bauer estimates the number murdered by the Nazis through mobile gas vans, disease, starvation in

¹¹² Sybil H. Milton “‘Gypsies’ as Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany,” in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 216.

¹¹³ It is important to note, however, that the Nazis never displayed the same fanatical obsession with killing Gypsies as they did with purging the world of Jews. Gypsies were largely seen as a superfluous, criminal nuisance rather than as the diabolical anti-race that the Jews were. Inga Clendinnen agrees “There was... a difference in the Gypsies’ positioning in Nazi ideology which bore on their treatment in life, if not on outcomes. Gypsies were classified as genetic asocials: that is, as defective humans, not enemies of humankind.” She argues that Gypsies who were deported to Auschwitz and other camps largely evaded the kind of cruel retribution inflicted on the Jews; Gypsies were not intense objects of abhorrence but were largely left to “die quietly” of hunger and disease. Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

¹¹⁴ Sybil H. Milton “‘Gypsies’ as Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany,” in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 212.

¹¹⁵ Jiri Lipa, “The Fate of the Gypsies in Czechoslovakia under Nazi Domination” in *Mosaic of Victims*, 207. Lewy argues, in contrast, that the Gypsies were not systematically targeted for annihilation as were the Jews. He says, some gypsies were considered “pure” and not subject to sterilization or deportation. The majority, however, were deemed to be pernicious polluters of the pure German race. Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁶ Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 185-186.

ghettos, gas chambers, and medical experimentation at 810,000.¹¹⁷ A text from Himmler dated March 10th, 1944, states that all the Reich Gypsies (as well as the Jews) had been thoroughly evacuated. Himmler ordered that all the warnings signs and bans posted against the Gypsy threat were to be taken down, since they were no longer unnecessary;¹¹⁸ Germany was rid of the Gypsy nuisance.

Because there are no exact statistics on record as to how many Gypsies lived under Nazi controlled territories, nor how many were deliberately exterminated, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of their losses during what the Roma language calls *Porajmos* (the Devouring). The historiography of the Holocaust throughout the past decades has primarily revolved around antisemitism and the uniqueness of the Jewish destruction, and provided only cursory mention of the fate of the Roma and Sinti.¹¹⁹ There is no extant historical evidence that the churches within Germany or beyond sought to combat such stigmatization or increasingly cruel policies against the Gypsies, even when these measures culminated in extermination. Long alienated and excommunicated from German society, as well as from the church's sphere of care and concern, the Gypsies' lives were seen as dispensable.

¹¹⁷ Yehuda Bauer, "The Place of the Holocaust in Contemporary History" in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds. (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 25. Doris Bergen, says, in all, German perpetrators and their accomplices killed an estimated one-quarter to half a million Gypsies, including many children. Thousands of others were forcibly sterilized, to ensure they would be wiped out in posterity. Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 190.

¹¹⁸ Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1986), 265.

¹¹⁹ Yehuda Bauer writes, "In sheer demonic, cold-blooded brutality, the tragedy of the Romanies is one of the most terrible indictments of the Nazis. The fact that their fate is hardly ever mentioned, and that the mutilated Romany nation continues to be vilified and persecuted to this day should put all their European host nations to shame." Bauer, "The Place of the Holocaust in Contemporary History" in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds. (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 25. The horrific narrative of Gypsy persecution has not received an abundance of scholarly research. Because Gypsies do not maintain a literate culture but their historical memory is largely oral, research such as Guenter Lewy's *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* revolved around compilations of official records, rather than interviews or testimonies of victims. Gypsies are largely suspect of any outsiders who seek to probe too deeply into their experiences of persecution. Bauer points out that Gypsy persecution did not end with the Nazi atrocities of 1945. "The Gypsies who have survived the war continued to be hunted and discriminated against in postwar Germany." Gypsy people received nothing in the way of post-war reparations, nor were they invited to testify of their experiences at Nuremberg War crimes Trial, not any other major legal proceedings involving Nazi atrocities against humanity in the immediate postwar period. Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), 337.

2. THE FATE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

In the earliest days of the Third Reich, the Nazis began to suppress several Christian minorities whom they felt were subversive to their ideology and goals. The Jehovah's Witnesses had been active in Germany since 1896.¹²⁰ Witnesses were singled out by the Nazis as enemies of the state because Nazis recognized in them a rival ideology; Witnesses saw themselves as citizens of another kingdom, and therefore refused to vote in and fight for the earthly state. Their enthusiastic door-to-door proselytism and distinctive ethics made them particularly conspicuous within German society. Small in number at only 20,000 out of a total German population of 65 million,¹²¹ the Witnesses were generally viewed as pesky heretics by the mainstream churches in Germany. Thus, they had little solidarity with the rest of German society. As early as 1916-1918, Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to take part in military service for ethical reasons were being put into insane asylums after being diagnosed as suffering from "religious mania."¹²²

The clash between the Witnesses and Hitler began almost immediately after he was appointed chancellor in January 1933. Nazi regulations banned the Jehovah's Witnesses' activities in various states of the Reich on the basis of the February 28, 1933 order "for the prevention of Communistic acts of violence dangerous to the State" and for "the restoration of public security and order."¹²³ Subsequently, the Nazis began breaking up their meetings, ransacking their offices, and destroying their publications; twenty-five truckloads of Bibles and Watchtower Bible literature were publically burned.¹²⁴

By April of 1935, the campaign against Witnesses intensified; the Reich and Prussian Minister of the Interior nationally banned the Witnesses and ordered the appropriate local officials to dissolve the Watchtower Society completely—although

¹²⁰ Gabriele Yonan "Spiritual Resistance of Christian Conviction in Nazi Germany: The Case of the Jehovah's Witnesses" in the *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 41:2 (1999), 309.

¹²¹ M. Kater, "Die Ernsten Bibelforscher im dritten Reich" in *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 17 (Munich, 1969), 181.

¹²² Richard J. Evans, "Social Outsiders in German History from the Sixteenth Century to 1933" in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 33.

¹²³ Gabriele Yonan "Spiritual Resistance of Christian Conviction in Nazi Germany: The Case of the Jehovah's Witnesses" in the *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 41:2 (1999), 318.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

many Witnesses carried on their publication and preaching endeavors underground. The same year, the Nazis mandated compulsory military service—Witnesses refusing to participate in the war efforts were arrested and incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps. In 1936, the first wave of mass arrests and deportation to concentration camps took place. Arrests of Jehovah’s Witnesses reached their zenith in 1937 and 1938. Doris Bergen describes how “German authorities cooked up many reasons to be suspicious of them,” including the fact that their organization had international ties, especially with the U.S. and their close theological connection with Judaism, Zionism, and the Old Testament.¹²⁵ Of the more than 20,000 Witnesses in Germany, almost one out of two was arrested. One record estimates that 8,917 were imprisoned in concentration camps, 253 were sentenced to death, and 203 of these were actually executed.¹²⁶ J.S. Conway says of their number, “Foremost amongst the opponents of Nazism were the Jehovah’s Witnesses, of whom a higher proportion (97 per cent) suffered some form of persecution than any of the other churches.” He estimates that no less than a third of Witnesses lost their lives because of their refusal to conform or compromise.¹²⁷

In many of the concentration camps, Jehovah’s Witnesses were required to wear a purple triangle to distinguish them from other inmates. Besides this triangle and their unique faith, one thing that set the Witnesses apart is that they remained in the camps, largely by choice. Christine E. King describes how “Freedom could be bought by a signature on a simple document denouncing the Jehovah’s Witness movement, yet very few signed.”¹²⁸ Likewise, M. James Penton points out that,

Unlike Gypsies, Jews, and the handicapped, the Witnesses were persecuted for their beliefs and their actions, not their “racial” or physical nature. They remained “Aryans” in the eyes of the Nazis, and thus potentially salvageable. The Nazis therefore offered them the unique option of winning release by signing a statement repudiating their beliefs. Most refused,

¹²⁵ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 92.

¹²⁶ Quoted in *Jahrbuch der Zeugen Jehovas* 1974 (Wiesbaden: Wachturm Bibel und Traktat-Gesellschaft, 1974), 212.

¹²⁷ J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-1945* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001), 196.

¹²⁸ Christine E. King, “Jehovah’s Witnesses under Nazism,” in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York, 1990), 191.

continuing to preach, distribute literature, and bear up under terrible sufferings.¹²⁹

There was no protest within Germany as increasingly menacing procedures were being enacted against the Witnesses, in fact, leaders of the official German Protestant and Catholic churches actively encouraged state measures against a religious group they considered to be both dangerous and schismatic. Witnesses were disliked by mainstream Christians due to their indefatigable efforts to win converts and they were seen as suspect and anti-German because they would not pledge allegiance to the state, nor offer themselves in service to the military. Doris Bergen says “their door-to-door preaching made them an easily identifiable, unpopular, marginal minority whom other Christians ridiculed as a cult.”¹³⁰

3. THE FATE OF HOMOSEXUALS

The Nazi worldview was inimical to perceived deviations in all areas of life. According to Johnson and Rittner, since at least as early as the formation of the German nation under Otto von Bismark in 1871, “homosexuals were considered outside the boundaries of German society.”¹³¹ Paragraph 175 of the notorious Reich legal code had outlawed sexual relations between men saying, “A male who indulges in criminally indecent activities with another male or who allows himself to participate in such activities will be punished with jail.”¹³² In the Weimer Republic, homosexuality had been classified as a psychological disorder, although some believed it was a contagious, though curable, social disease. A number of political groups in the Weimer Republic sought the elimination of the burgeoning homosexual

¹²⁹ M. James Penton, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Third Reich: Sectarian Politics under Persecution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹³⁰ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 58.

¹³¹ “Circles of Hell: Jewish and Non-Jewish Victims of the Nazis,” Mary Johnson and Carol Rittner, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 548, The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future. (Nov. 1996), 131.

¹³² Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 57.

subculture in cities such as Berlin on the grounds that it was corrupting young men and preventing them from reproducing.¹³³

Homosexuals faced both cultural and religious hostility, as well as ideological opposition in the Third Reich. Geoffrey Giles says, “Manliness was a vital part of the National Socialist identity. Hitler’s Third Reich was conceived as a man’s world.”¹³⁴ Gay men were seen as weak, degenerate, and effeminate; thus they imperiled the master race because they were unable to wage war on behalf of the German Volk. Homosexuals were also painted as an abomination because they opted out of the reproduction of the so-called Aryan master race, which was a sacred obligation for the perpetuation of the Volk. Thus they could not effectively perform either of the prime masculine tasks—war and progeneration—according to Nazi ideology.

The proliferation of homosexual rights in the Weimer Republic seemed to represent the decadence of a society that had jettisoned its traditional values and weakened the moral fiber of the nation. Hitler was able to capitalize on such fears and offer promises of a restoration of acceptable social values in conjunction with a resurgence of national vigor. Just weeks after taking office, persecution of male homosexuals quickly escalated.¹³⁵ By the summer of 1933, stormtroopers were raiding gay bars and homosexual organizations were banned in Germany. By December 1934 “homosexual intent” was sufficient to warrant criminal prosecution.¹³⁶

¹³³ “Social Outsiders in German History from the Sixteenth Century to 1933” in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 35.

¹³⁴ Geoffrey J. Giles “The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich” in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 238.

¹³⁵ While same sex relationships among males remained unlawful within the Weimar Republic under Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, homosexual-rights activists made great strides in reforming societal attitudes towards homosexuality, leading many conservatives within Germany to lament the Weimar Republic’s toleration of homosexuals as a symbol of Germany’s moral decline. Interestingly, lesbians were generally not regarded as a threat to Nazi racial policies, nor explicitly targeted for persecution. For an investigation into the lives of lesbians during the Third Reich see: Claudia Schoppman, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and R. Amy Elman, “Lesbians and the Holocaust” in *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*, Esther Fuchs, ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 9-17.

¹³⁶ A Mosaic of Victims in *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, 70-71. Bastian notes that between the years of 1933 and 1945 an estimated 100,000 were brought to trial for suspected homosexual

In 1936, Heinrich Himmler created a special office to engage in war against the “vice” of homosexuality—the Reich Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion. Some ten to fifteen thousand homosexuals were imprisoned during the *Hitlerzeit* and branded within the camps as “deviants” with a pink triangle. Ruediger Laumann says that because the Aryan status of homosexuals was not usually in doubt, as a matter of policy they were not systematically murdered “although those who wore the pink triangle met an unusually harsh fate.”¹³⁷ Even though the number of gay men that perished in the camps is unknown, Burleigh and Wippermann cite an inmate of Dachau who claimed “the prisoners with the pink triangle did not live very long; they were quickly and systematically exterminated by the SS.”¹³⁸ Doris Bergen says of those who wore the pink triangle,

Viewed even by many fellow prisoners as the scum of humanity, they suffered severely from torture, beating, and medical experimentation. Perhaps their isolation from other prisoners explains the extremely high death rate among gay inmates in Nazi camps; it was about 60 percent compared to 41 percent for political prisoners and 35 percent for Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹³⁹

Laumann also sheds light on the extreme isolation which homosexuals endured. He says that because their subculture and gay organizations outside the concentration camps had been utterly abolished, no group solidarity existed for them inside the camp either. “Homosexuals were generally regarded as worthless, even by their fellow prisoners. Thus few accounts of those who wore the pink triangles exist.”¹⁴⁰ In Buchenwald they were subject to abuse not only by camp officials and

activity. About half of these were convicted. Till Bastian *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich: Geschichte einer Verfolgung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000) 55.

¹³⁷ Ruediger Laumann, “Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps” in *Mosaic of Victims*, 202.

¹³⁸ Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 191-197.

¹³⁹ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 192. According to Bastian, the total number of homosexuals put in concentration camps is estimated at between 5,000 and 15,000. *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich: Geschichte einer Verfolgung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000) 73.

¹⁴⁰ Laumann, “Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps” in *Mosaic of Victims*, 203. Ruediger points out that the death rate for homosexual prisoners was 60%, one and a half times as high as that for political prisoners and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Three out of four deaths of homosexual prisoners occurred within the first year after their committal. 204. Laumann concludes that “The destinies of Jews and homosexuals within the camp approximate each other. In the concentration camp, both groups found themselves at the bottom of the current hierarchy below the non-Jewish racially defined groups of prisoners.” See “Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps” in *Mosaic of Victims*, 204. Richard Plant, a

guards but other fellow prisoners habitually derided and abused them.¹⁴¹ The total number of homosexuals put in concentration camps is estimated at between 5,000 and 15,000.

One struggles in vain for accounts of ecclesial resistance to the disenfranchisement, imprisonment, and destruction of homosexuals. An attracting element of the Nazi platform was their claim to be moral crusaders of sorts, who wanted to expunge the “vice” of homosexuality from Germany once and for all. Homosexuals were ultimately viewed as polluters of the new humanity envisioned by the Nazis, and many in the Christian churches found great consonance with this platform. Clearly, one of the reasons that Hitler was initially so appealing to many within the churches was because of his strong stance towards “traditional family values,” ideals that the majority of German Christians saw as antithetical to homosexuality. Even if not all Christians agreed with the brutality of Nazi methods, their reticence to the persecution of gays in Germany betrays a contempt for homosexuals and the belief that the homosexual Other had little, if any, place in the churches’ universe of concern.

4. THE FATE OF THE PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY IMPAIRED

The first victims of the Nazi “gardening” operation were not the Jews but those with disabilities. Individuals that were deemed to be physically malformed, mentally disturbed and intellectually impaired were seen as polluting the purity of the nation’s gene pool. While in the Weimar Republic, those with physical and mental disabilities were protected and eugenic measures were legally prohibited, the Nazis quickly overturned Weimar’s stance on eugenics. On July 14th 1933, the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases (*Erbkrankheiten*) demanded the sterilization of those afflicted with various kinds of disease—ranging from severe disabilities to short term psychiatric problems. Sterilization could be warranted for

survivor of the camps himself, presents detailed evidence regarding the excruciating treatment that homosexuals endured within the camps. See *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1988).

¹⁴¹ Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 34-35.

congenital “feeble-mindedness,” schizophrenia, manic depression, hereditary epilepsy, blindness and deafness, and serious physical deformities.¹⁴²

Burleigh and Wippermann describe the intricate process of how courts were established throughout the Reich in order to ascertain who necessitated sterilization. These courts were charged to meticulously monitor the health conditions of the German population utilizing a complex series of tests to weed out the most undesirable candidates for life in the new German Reich.¹⁴³ Under the 1933 sterilization law, an estimated 200,000 to 350,000 individuals deemed unfit to reproduce were sterilized against their will through vasectomy or ligation of ovarian or in some cases x-rays of radium. Resultantly, several thousand people died from these procedures, women more so than men, because of the greater risks of tubal ligation.¹⁴⁴ James Glass concludes,

While the Sterilization Law did not explicitly single out Jews, it provided a preview for later, more drastic measures aimed at ridding the culture of its genetic and blood deformities. In retrospect, the sterilization program served as an early paradigm for techniques of annihilation and the public policy of sanitizing the culture against biological and genetic threat.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² The opening paragraph of the law declared, “Any person suffering from a hereditary disease can be sterilized if medical knowledge indicates that his offspring will suffer from severe hereditary physical or mental damage.” Sterilization was intended for all those not considered quality raw material for spawning the new master race that the Nazis envisioned.

¹⁴³ Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 136-40.

¹⁴⁴ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 105. While the most common basis for the decision to sterilize was “feeble-mindedness,” followed by schizophrenia and epilepsy, many others were targeted as well. Through interviews with over 1000 deaf survivors of Nazi hygiene laws, Horst Biesold provides a heart-breaking portrayal of the treatment accorded to the deaf population in Hitler’s Germany. He chronicles that even though there were debates taking place about the link between deafness and heredity, deafness because officially classified as a hereditary disease in Nazi Germany, opening the floodgates for the forced sterilization of Germany’s deaf community. Biesold narrates how teachers, doctors, and numerous others throughout the Reich willingly turned in their deaf neighbors—even those whose deafness was caused due to an accident. See *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany* (Gallaudet University Press 2004).

Also forcibly sterilized was a group of non-Caucasians known disparagingly as the “Rhineland bastards.” These were the children, usually illegitimate, of German mothers and colonial soldiers in the Allied armies occupying the Rhineland following World War I. During the 1930s, the German government registered and evaluated these so called “colored” children, ultimately deeming them genetically unfit breeding material and sterilizing them against their will. For more see Reiner Pommerin, *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde: Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit, 1918-1937* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979) and Tina M. Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, (University of Michigan Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁵ James Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life*, 43.

The bifurcation between Aryan and non-Aryan, weak and strong, worthy of life and unworthy of life became an ineluctable dimension of life during the Third Reich which would continue to ring louder with genocidal tones. The late 1930s signaled an evolution from compulsory sterilization to euthanasia. In October 1939, Hitler passed legislation enabling Germany's doctors to perform "mercy deaths" on patients they considered to be incurable. Under the guise of a merciful palliation of chronic pain and suffering for the terminally ill, the Nazis were able to exterminate the mentally and physically disabled, thus purging the nation of those who exacted a heavy financial burden on German society.¹⁴⁶ The unworthiness of the disabled was disseminated throughout the Reich through skillful propaganda that stigmatized the handicapped and labeled them as "useless feeders."¹⁴⁷

Because the Nazis were uncertain about how the general populace would react to the murder of patients within government and church-run asylums and nursing homes, the operation was largely carried out in secrecy under the code name "Aktion T4."¹⁴⁸ The process began with the collection of questionnaires about patient's health and ability to work, ostensibly as part of a statistical survey. Once completed, these questionnaires were shipped to a review commission of physicians who would base their decision on the form's contents—without ever having seen the patient. A plus sign (+) meant inclusion in the program and thus, death; a minus sign (-) signified exclusion from the web of death—at least for the time being.¹⁴⁹ Robert Proctor describes how under the euthanasia program,

¹⁴⁶ Donald J. Dietrich writes that by the outbreak of World War II, the suggestions were already being made that eliminating the mentally ill and disabled would create a larger food supply as well as free up more hospital beds for those who "deserved to live." *Catholic Citizens in the Third Reich: Psycho-Social Principles and Moral Reasoning* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 223.

¹⁴⁷ For example a propaganda poster of the 1930s reads: "Everyday, a cripple or blind person costs 5-6 RM [Reichmarks], a mentally ill person 4 RM, a criminal 3.50 RM." The poster highlights an attractive "Aryan" couple surrounded by five small children and says "a worker has 3-4 RM a day to spend on his family." In Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ T-4 was the address of the headquarters in Berlin, Tiergartenstrasse 4. The program was officially operating in October of 1939. Hitler wrote an official statement charging doctors with the responsibility to grant a mercy death to those suffering from incurable disease. The memo was backdated to September 1st, 1939, the day of the German invasion of Poland, presumably so that Hitler could connect the decision to begin mercy kills with the exigencies and upheaval associated with war.

¹⁴⁹ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 107. Barnett recounts, "Indeed the top secret status of the euthanasia program, officially maintained by the Nazis until the end, was a sham. Annemarie Grosch, who worked in a Confessing Church parish in Berlin at the time, recalled that she heard about it very early. *For the Soul of the People*, 108.

The task of medicine was thus transformed: the traditional doctor of the individual would be replaced by the genetic doctor...an entirely new kind of doctor: one who cared for the future of the race, one who put the good of the whole over the good of the part.¹⁵⁰

From the beginning of 1940, regular transports of buses brought the hapless patients to one of six euthanasia center, where gas-chambers and crematoria had been constructed by the General Welfare Foundation for Institutional Care in order to eliminate such “useless feeders.” While these “mercy killings” were often veiled in euphemistic language such as “special treatment”, “disinfection,” “cleansing,” “therapy” etc. the final outcome was the same, destruction. Robert Jay Lifton sums up this program well saying,

Euthanasia is what the Nazis called their project, but...it was not genuine euthanasia. Euthanasia really means helping the dying to die, the idea that a person should be allowed to have a good death or a dignified death. Under the guise or cloak of euthanasia, the Nazis murdered a hundred thousand people, mostly mental patients. They considered these people ‘life unworthy of life.’¹⁵¹

Numerous scholars have suggested that the Nazi sterilization and euthanasia programs were forerunners to the subsequent genocide of the Final Solution. Euthanasia was a critical step in the Nazi trail of terror and a line can be perceived from the mass exterminations of Jews and other unfortunate expendables back to the first secretive murder of a physically disabled child in a state-run euthanasia clinic. John Conway stresses this saying,

The extermination of useless lives...provided invaluable information on the most effective methods for exterminating others who were considered unworthy of life...There is ample evidence that the techniques of the gas-chambers and the equipment of the crematoria first used in the euthanasia operation were later used at the extermination camps at Auschwitz and

¹⁵⁰ Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 67.

¹⁵¹ Robert Jay Lifton, “Sterilization and Euthanasia,” in *A Mosaic of Victims*, 222.

Treblinka, where they were put to use on a much larger scale during the subsequent years of terror and annihilation.¹⁵²

Michael Berenbaum likewise underscores how the murder of the disabled was a prefiguration of the Holocaust and the killing centers for the handicapped were the antecedent of death camps. They were often staffed by the same physicians who received their specialized training and lost their moral inhibitions in this early exercise in mass murder.”¹⁵³ A similar notion is expressed by Donald Dietrich who says,

There is an intrinsic connection linking the pre-1933 eugenic debates, the sterilisation law of 1933 to which the Church never mounted meaningful opposition, the euthanasia measures of 1939, and the Final Solution launched in 1941. These policies did not originate in a vacuum, but rather had a unique and traceable genesis. The eugenic roots of these genetic and racial policies can be found in earlier popular, medical, juridical, and moral-theological debates which supported the control and, in some cases, the elimination of medically, socially and, ultimately, the racially unwanted.¹⁵⁴

Despite the Reich’s best intentions, the secrecy surrounding the T-4 program quickly dissipated. Rumors began to spread throughout the nation that when the mental hospitals had been emptied, the homes for the elderly would be next on the Nazi agenda. German citizens worried that soldiers who had been incurably wounded in battle might too, ultimately end up as “life unworthy of life.”¹⁵⁵ By the end of 1940, 35,224 patients had been murdered and some members within the Christian churches began to insist that the church openly oppose what was taking place.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² John Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 272.

¹⁵³ Michael Berenbaum ed. *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Murdered and Persecuted by the Nazis* (New York University Press, 1992),

¹⁵⁴ “Catholic Resistance or Racist Eugenics” In *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich. Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffmann*, Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes, eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 150.

¹⁵⁵ John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), 269.

¹⁵⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 115.

B. The Church's Response to Euthanasia

Unlike the other groups of victims portrayed here, there is significant historical documentation of church protests stemming from a number of ecclesiastical authorities on behalf of those targeted for these so-called “mercy killings.” In December of 1940, Pope Pius XII issued a statement denouncing the “killing of an innocent person because of mental or physical defects.”¹⁵⁷ Some local clergy from within the ranks of both Protestants and Catholics also issued public calls to respect the dignity of human life and cease the euthanasia program. After hearing the reports of euthanasia taking place throughout Germany, Pastor Paul Gerhard Braune, gathered together as much concrete evidence about the killings as possible and composed an eight page memo in 1940 condemning the euthanasia program:

How far does one want to go with the extermination of so-called lives unworthy of life? The mass actions up to now have shown that many people have been taken who were in large part of clear and sane mind. Where does the limit lie? Who is abnormal, antisocial, who is hopelessly ill?...It is a dangerous venture to abandon the integrity of the person without any legal foundation...Will it not endanger the ethics of the entire population, when human life counts for so little?¹⁵⁸

Tragically, Braune was the only one who signed the memo—at that time no one else had the courage necessary to confront the Nazi state. Braune was arrested by the Gestapo in August of 1940 and imprisoned for three months in a concentration camp. He was freed after promising not “to undertake further actions against measures of the state or the party.”¹⁵⁹

More passionate protests against mercy killings would not be issued by the churches until the summer of 1941. By then, between 70,000 and 80,000 people had been killed in the program within Germany alone. Bishop Theophil Wurm of Württemberg, like Pastor Braun, had been assembling data about what was taking

¹⁵⁷ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 129. Likewise, Catholic Bishop Konrad von Preysing of Berlin preached a sermon against euthanasia saying, “No justification and no excuse can be found for taking away the life of the weak or the ill for any sort of economic or eugenic reasons...With the same determination as she has protected the institution of marriage...the church will protect the right of every individual to live.” Quoted in J.S. Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 270.

¹⁵⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 110.

¹⁵⁹ Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), 312.

place and issued a strong remonstrance to the Interior Minister declaring the impossibility of Christians condoning such barbaric measures.¹⁶⁰ Receiving no response, he authored a second letter asking the Minister,

Must the German nation be the first civilized people which in the treatment of the weak returns to the customary practice of primitive peoples? Does the Führer know of this matter? Has he approved it? ...I plead not to leave me without an answer in this extremely serious matter.

The response he received stated that everything was *in Ordnung*, that Wurm could rest secure because everything undertaken within the euthanasia program was perfectly undergirded by legality.¹⁶¹ Although Wurm's letters failed to bring about the cessation of the euthanasia program, copies of his letter of remonstrance were dispersed throughout Germany and beyond. Resultantly, Bishop Wurm was hailed as a courageous voice for the voiceless and an inspiration of passionate non-conformity within the Confessing Church.¹⁶²

Bishop Clemens August von Galen of Münster is noted as the first prominent clergyman to openly speak out against the euthanasia program. He created an international uproar by his three famous sermons of July 13th, 20th, and August 3rd, 1941.¹⁶³ These sermons explicitly denounced the euthanasia murders as a violation of the sixth commandment "Thou shall not kill." Galen's sermons were circulated throughout Germany and outwith by those who were sympathetic within the churches to the plight of euthanasia victims. Nazi leadership was furious but did not venture to take action against Galen due to his popularity. According to Conway, the public reaction was "immediate and bitter," so much so that Hitler was forced to take

¹⁶⁰ John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), 270.

¹⁶¹ Undeterred, in December 1941, Würm wrote a memorandum to Hitler from the church leaders' conference. He delivered it personally to the Reich Chancellery in Berlin: "Whoever now opens and deepens internal differences acts irresponsibly and in a way detrimental to the Volk. Much has occurred that could only be of use to enemy propaganda; among this, we count the measures for the removal of the mentally ill and the increasing harshness in the treatment of non-Aryans, even those who confess the Christian faith." Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 199.

¹⁶² Ibid. Even though several key figures such as these within the Confessing Church spoke out on occasion against the euthanasia program, it is important to note that Germany's Confessing Church would not issue its first public protest against euthanasia until their 12th synod in October of 1943.

¹⁶³ See *Bischof Graf von Galen Spricht! Ein apostolischer Kampf und sein Widerhall*, H. Portmann ed, (Freiburg, 1946), 66-76.

note and halt the operation.¹⁶⁴ On August 24, 1941, just 21 days after Bishop Galen's sermon, Hitler signed an order ostensibly halting the euthanasia program.¹⁶⁵ By this time, the official records show that 70,273 patients and children had been murdered—the actual numbers were considerably higher.¹⁶⁶

Ultimately, the ecclesial protest mustered by a few courageous leaders such as Wurm, Brauen, and von Galen was sufficient to galvanize public opinion against the killing of the mentally and physically impaired; but sadly this dissent came too late—nearly ten years after the initial program of forced sterilization had begun. It is estimated that by 1945, the Germans murdered some 275,000 people they deemed handicapped throughout German-occupied Europe.¹⁶⁷

A significant factor explaining why so few in the ranks of the churches protested,¹⁶⁸ was that Germans were inundated with the notion that what was taking place was not murder, but rather the destruction of “life unworthy of life” for the good of the whole nation (*Gemeinwohl*). Barnett cites a story that elucidates the deep ambiguities in the church's encounter with euthanasia. She tells of a man who appealed to a family friend, an SS official, to save his institutionalized sister, and received this reply:

I personally believe that Christian love for one's neighbor takes a false path in the careful maintenance of the mentally ill, and that it is more Christian and humane to release such invalids from their pitiful fate...I ask you, dear colleague, to keep in mind that at this moment the finest and healthiest of our young men are giving their lives, daily and hourly, for our people in the

¹⁶⁴ John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 271.

¹⁶⁵ Doris Bergen says Hitler's order to halt the euthanasia program was “little more than a ploy.” It is well known that the killings did not stop, nor did Hitler intend them to. The secrecy around them, however, was heightened and a number of the killing locations were moved to outside of Germany, particularly in the East. In *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 133. Burleigh and Wippermann argue that the euthanasia program most like came to an end, simply because by August 1941 the projected target for 'disinfected' people had been reached. *The Racial State*, 153.

¹⁶⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 118.

¹⁶⁷ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 129.

¹⁶⁸ Ernst Klee points to evidence that there were complaints from a number of religious institutions which housed the physically and mentally disabled, but these protests were made because these institutions were losing some of their patients who were being transferred over to the state institutions performing mercy killings. The remonstrations stemmed from the fact that these transfers to state institutions were causing serious economic difficulties for religious institutions who were losing their patients and the concomitant funding. “Euthanasie” im NS-Staat: Die Vernichtung “lebensunwerten Lebens” (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1985), 67.

war...When one considers this, the blow of fate which affects one family, on the basis of the fulfillment of the above measures, [i.e. euthanasia] can indeed be borne more lightly.¹⁶⁹

A blizzard of skillful propaganda, however, does not adequately explain the response of the churches. Not only were the Nazis perfecting the science of genocide through euthanasia measures, but they were also testing the waters of public opinion and the possibility of protest and outrage. They were trying to ascertain how much the nation's citizens really cared about its weak and voiceless; how much they wanted to share living space and bear the financial burden of these "broken" people. In essence, they were trying to gauge the parameters of moral obligation for those on the margins of society. Doris Bergen says, "The program to kill deformed children served Nazi planners as a kind of trial balloon, sent up to test reactions. The responses they perceived indicated that it was safe to go even further in attacks on people considered handicapped."¹⁷⁰

While tepid and sporadic in their protests, it is certainly true that the plight of the victims of mercy killings was a source of debate and concern within the ranks of at least some of the local churches in Germany. Unfortunately this same level of concern was not visible when it came to Hitler's policies regarding the Jews.¹⁷¹ We can only speculate what might have happened if more church leaders had possessed the courage and moral vision to speak out on behalf of the Jewish people—but the very same bishops and pastors who, on occasion, were willing to speak out against the killing of their own fellow Germans, were voiceless when it came to the fate of the Jews and others labeled as unfortunate expendables. Such silence proved that no one was willing to stand up for them.

This pattern of ecclesial reticence toward the Jews is evidenced with the case of von Galen, hailed as the great churchman resister when it came to contending

¹⁶⁹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 109-110.

¹⁷⁰ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 100.

¹⁷¹ Although there *were* some critical debates taking place within the German churches reading Nazi racial policies toward non-Aryan Christians. There were also a number of protests issued, both in the form of sermons and as memorandums written on behalf of Jewish converts to Christianity, particularly within the ranks of the Confessing Church. See Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000)

against euthanasia policies. Beth Griech-Polelle writes that after the Reich government declined to prosecute him for speaking out against euthanasia, he received a letter in September 1941, from an anonymous source, openly commending him for his courageous sermons and his stand against Nazi “mercy killings.” The letter said, “The nation has stood by as public crimes have begun against the Jews.” Was von Galen aware, it asked, that Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland were perishing from starvation in ghettos and that the fate of thousands of other Jews was in peril? Then, a critical question was posed to von Galen, “Will *you* stand up and be our helper?” Griech-Polelle writes, “Von Galen would not be that defender. He would not stand up and seek to help Jews specifically.” He would not raise his voice against the deportations of Jews even though he was aware of the implications of being “relocated.” Quite tellingly, in December of 1941, when the Jews of his own city in Münster began to be deported, shipped off for extermination to Riga and Minsk, von Galen posed no threat to the process. He would utter no word of protest on the Jews’ behalf.¹⁷²

The examples of opposition on behalf of victims of euthanasia recounted here raise disconcerting questions about the legacy of the churches under Nazism. Why were select churchmen willing to risk opposing the Nazi state and offer dissent on behalf of victims of euthanasia when there was deafening silence towards the vast majority of victims of the Nazi regime? It seems plausible that this exception was made because the majority of euthanasia victims were fellow Germans¹⁷³ and therefore still had a place, however peripheral, within the church’s universe of moral obligation. Christian protests likely sprang from the realization that their own kind (i.e. true Germans) were being eliminated, people who were actually a lot like

¹⁷² Beth Griech-Polelle “Image of a Churchman-Resister: Bishop von Galen, the Euthanasia Project and the Sermons of Summer 1941” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36:1 (Jan, 2001), 56. Griech-Polelle asserts that von Galen’s sermon “was a forthright accusation against the state for practicing euthanasia illegally. However, it was never a plea for the protection of innocent Jews suffering persecution, nor was it a call for insurrection against the Nazi state. One could perhaps posit that some listeners might have taken the message of ‘Thou shalt not kill’ one step further than the euthanasia of invalids to include the murder of Jews, but the message of von Galen’s sermon did not seem to suggest that parishioners should fight to protect another minority in the Reich.” 51.

¹⁷³ Henry Friedlander says, “The euthanasia killing program was directed primarily against the German (and Austrian) nationals, but it was not restricted to Germans or to so called Aryans. In Poland, the Germans killed almost all disabled Poles; the hospitals were either closed or converted for German use. The same applied to the occupied Soviet Union.”¹⁷³ Friedlander, “The Exclusion of the Disabled” in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157.

themselves, and whose destruction posed a certain credible danger to their own lives. Griech-Polelle confirms this contention by highlighting one of Galen's sermons of protest against the euthanasia program. The sermon was directly meant to impress upon parishioners that *they too*, could all be affected by these killings at some point. Von Galen underscored that *anyone* could, at some point in their lives, be classified as "unproductive" to society. This meant that for those living in a world where the killing of unproductive people is warranted, no one's life could be considered safe.¹⁷⁴

The question will likely never be answered, whether or not the considerable influence of the churches in Germany and beyond could have significantly mitigated the horrors perpetrated by the National Socialist regime, but the fact that the euthanasia program was moved underground after even a handful of ecclesial protests speaks volumes for Hitler's concern for public opinion.¹⁷⁵ While a small spark of resistance is documented within the churches regarding victims of euthanasia, the troubling record shows that there was no one willing to speak out against the persecution of others who were ensnared in the Nazi machinery of extermination. Guenter Lewy points out that,

The large majority of the very people who had been outraged when their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, had been put to death, failed to react in the same manner when their Jewish neighbors were deported and eventually killed in the very chambers designed for and first tried out in the euthanasia program.¹⁷⁶

While many complex factors and pressures were at play in the narrative of the *Kirchenkampf* in Germany, the churches' veritable silence in the face of the wholesale destruction of groups such as Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals,

¹⁷⁴ Von Galen used the example of a 55-year-old institutionalized farmer recently killed while his son was fighting in the war, explaining how deeply the morale of soldiers fighting would be damaged by these measures. Beth Griech-Polelle "Image of a Churchman-Resister: Bishop von Galen, the Euthanasia Project and the Sermons of Summer 1941" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36:1 (Jan, 2001), 51.

¹⁷⁵ Doris Bergen confirms Nazi concern for public opinion saying, "Hitler and his associates in the new German leadership struck in dramatic, decisive ways, but they always tested public response to each move before proceeding further. This mixture of boldness and caution would be typical of Nazi tactics throughout the Third Reich, from its inception in 1933 to its collapse in 1945. Public opinion was very important to Hitler. A firm believer in the stab-in-the-back myth, he was convinced that a disgruntled German public had lost Germany the First World War. He was determined to avoid a repeat of that situation under his rule." Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide*, pg. 57.

¹⁷⁶ Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 266.

and to a lesser degree, the physical and mentally disabled seems to indicate that these “undesirable others” were no longer visible within the churches’ universe of concern and moral obligation. Those who did not fit into the new Nazi universe were extremely vulnerable and in need of someone to be a “voice for the voiceless.”¹⁷⁷ But, this narrative indicates that the vast majority of those slated for destruction were invisible, or seen by Christians as outsiders, to whom the church had little, if any, moral obligation, even in their moments of greatest need.¹⁷⁸

The universe of moral obligation is a useful conceptual tool to evaluate how various dimensions of ethical responsibilities are perceived. The universe of moral obligation can be envisioned as a pond, with ripples moving outward in concentric circles from the impact of a stone. At the center of the circle, alongside of ourselves, are loved ones—our dearest family and friends to whom our allegiances are most pronounced. We tend to consider those who are most “like us” as part of the innermost core of our universe of obligation: the circle of people for whom we feel responsible, whose rights we safeguard, and whose injustices must be vindicated. The next few concentric rings represent commitments to casual friends, to acquaintances, and to colleagues—those with whom we share commonalities and camaraderie, but have loyalty to a much lesser degree. It is outside of these circles of obligation where strangers, enemies, and all others who are not part of our universe dwell. Those who are farther away from the innermost core are in peril, because we are able to successfully disengage ourselves from them and eschew intervention

¹⁷⁷ Psalm 31:8.

¹⁷⁸ Another group of non-Jewish victims which suffered considerable losses under the Reich were the Poles. When World War II broke out, the Polish people quickly became the next major targets of the Nazi regime’s genocidal fury. Hitler told the Wehrmacht one week before the invasion of Poland to “kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language. Only in this way can we obtain the living space we need.” Janusz Gumkowski and Kazimierz Leszczynski, *Poland Under Nazi Occupation* (Polonia Publishing House: Warsaw, 1961), 59. To the Germans, the Poles and other Slavic people were subhumans—boorish and uneducated, slovenly and unsophisticated. The fact that eastern European industrialization lagged behind that of the west seemed to confirm those stereotypes for many Germans who conveniently ignored the artistic, cultural, and scientific achievements of the people who occupied part of their coveted *Lebensraum*. During almost six years of war, Poland lost 6,028,000 of its citizens or 22 percent of its total population, which constitutes the highest losses (ratio to population) of any European country. Richard C. Lukas, “The Polish Experience During the Holocaust” in *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Murdered and Persecuted by the Nazis*, Michael Berenbaum ed. (New York University Press, 1992), 90. Altogether, Barber and Harrison estimate that victims among Slavic peoples of the Nazi regime reached some 25 million. in Ronald G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia: Vol 3: The Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 217.

through justification, apathy, and vilification should they be in jeopardy. Or perhaps we are wholly indifferent and unaware of those beyond our sphere of care and concern and therefore no conscious rejection of them is even necessary.

While it is perfectly natural to envision moral obligation as belonging primarily to one's own kith and kin, the implications for ecclesiology are devastating. When churches limit their ambit of moral responsibility to their own kind, all others are jettisoned to the outside and left on their own, as this chapter illustrated was the fate of a host of victims of the Nazi regime. When boundaries of moral obligation become constricted and shriveled, churches are rendered powerless to see beyond the confines of their own narrow universe—and become incapable of entering into solidarity with those who exist beyond these contracted parameters.

C. Conclusion

This condensed sketch of the church's passivity toward non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime shines valuable insight on the pervasive tendency to reject the Other. I have contended that a significant underlying dynamic which is discernable in the churches' response to non-Jewish victims (and Jewish victims as well), is a deep-seated propensity for the Other to be invisible or to be cast outside the bounds of ethical care and concern. When this takes place, in the words of David Gushee, it allows Christians to "carve out a safe space for noninvolvement and non-identification"¹⁷⁹ even when the Other is suffering and in peril.

While post-Holocaust documents have predominantly accessed the church's behavior under Hitler in terms of antisemitism, an investigation into the churches' response to non-Jewish victims demands that we consider if this diagnosis goes deep enough in assessing the church's abysmal conduct under the Third Reich. It is imperative to understand precisely which aspects of Christian theology and self-understanding are in need of transformation, before a reform is possible; if there is to be hope for any kind of successful therapy, an incisive diagnosis must take place. If antisemitism is the (almost) sole focus of post-Holocaust theological attention, then Christian ecclesiology largely evades an even deeper self-reflection upon deleterious

¹⁷⁹ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, 62.

aspects of Christian and ecclesial identity, as well the connection between a rejection of otherness and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism, sexism, classism, sectarianism, homophobia, misogyny, etc. The price for eluding this painful process of recognition, repentance, and restitution is incalculable. The churches' passive response to non-Jewish victims demands that ecclesiology take seriously the challenge of a rejection of otherness, in each of its manifold forms.

IV. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Chapter three has analyzed three threads within post-Holocaust Christian theology through the lens of a rejection of otherness. It argued that these threads potentially exacerbate the tendency to assimilate, dominate, or eliminate the Other, particularly when considered in terms of their implications for ecclesial praxis.

Section one critiqued the emphasis on Jewish-Christian commonalities as problematic, not only because it relies on dubious and superficial nodes of common ground between Christians and Jews, but because it offers little in the way of resources for churches to foster solidarity with those who are radically other. Section two delineated the pervasiveness of the witness people myth, which remains the *modus operandi* in Christian theological reflection on the Jews and Judaism. It discussed Christian and ecclesial susceptibility to this hegemonic tendency to prescribe the role the Other will play in the Christian saga, instead of allowing the Other authentic space in which to offer his or her own self-definitions.

Finally, section three explored the narrative of non-Jewish victims and highlighted how the churches were largely mute, not only to Jewish persecution, but to the destruction of other undesirables under the Third Reich. The churches' response to non-Jewish victims provokes troubling questions about how boundaries of solidarity are conceived and constructed, and challenges a deeper investigation into the debilitating effects a rejection of otherness has on ecclesial practices.

These three tendencies within Christian post-Holocaust theology highlight the profoundly engrained aversion to the Other within Christian theology and practices and elucidate that in spite of the many innovative and commendable reformations

taking place within the realm of post-Holocaust theology, there are still critical areas where constructive work remains to be done.

Chapter five will explore some practical resources within Christian theology which might better equip churches on the way toward resisting this penchant to reject the Other and the inclination to confine ecclesial solidarity to those who are “like us.” Before investigating these resources and their import for ecclesiology, we will first turn to examine some dynamics of identity, which will be foundational for suggesting how Christian churches might foster identities capable of making space for otherness.

CHAPTER IV: INDIVIDUAL AND ECCLESIAL IDENTITY

It is not possible to speak of “the other” without speaking of “the self,” and of otherness without speaking of identity. For the others are always other to someone else...But how should we think of ourselves? What does it mean to be a bearer of identity?¹

After completing the descriptive and critical task in the previous chapters, chapters four and five will move toward a more constructive approach. This chapter will (1) discuss some dynamics of identity in order to establish groundwork for both Christian identity and ecclesial identity; (2) explore the potential that distorted identities have to breed violence against the Other through an analysis of both genocide and sectarianism; and (3) reflect on specific aspects of Christian identity and ecclesial identity, as well as suggest potential resources within the Christian faith for the cultivation of inclusive identities which make space for otherness.

I. IDENTITY: A DEFINITION

Even though the word “identity” is prevalent in everyday discourse, it is difficult to offer a succinct definition which adequately encapsulates its meaning. The fundamental paradox of identity is inherent in the term itself; deriving from the Latin word *idem*, meaning “the same,” the term denotes the quality of being identifiable and is closely linked to the idea of permanence throughout time. Thus, the concept of identity connotes those stable, defining characteristics of a person that comprise individuality. Yet, as this section will explore, the notion of identity is anything but fixed or simplistic to characterize.

Social psychologist Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams define identity simply as “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others.”² My working definition of identity builds on that concept: identity is an interpretive framework that enables us to categorize disparate facets of

¹ Miroslav Volf, “Living with the ‘Other’” in *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human Dimensions*, John Dudley Woodberry, Osman Zümrüt and Mustafa Köylü eds. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 8.

² See *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

our lives together into a meaningful whole. This interpretive framework enables us to “tell our story,” to draw together the crucial events and elements of our lives into a single autobiography or overarching narrative.

Human beings are faced with a myriad of sociological and philosophical questions from which to derive meaning. Who am I? Who do I want to be? Who do others (my family, society, religious community, the media, etc.) think I am and want me to be? Who (or where) is my home, community, etc.? The formation of identity is the result of a complex interplay between these questions and factors such as individual decisions, particular life events and community, societal or religious expectations. These diverse factors coalesce to comprise the core of our existence, i.e. our identity.

Identity is inherently complex for a number of reasons. First, identity is comprised of numerous layers of being and belonging; it is multi-dimensional because human beings generally define themselves based on a number of affiliations and commitments, some of which are deemed more central than others. Marc Gopin points out, as human beings “we see ourselves as part of more than one collective identity—the human race, the nation, the clan, the family, the religion—and this complicates the question of self, other and boundaries.”³ Identity is thus something *I*, as the individual, possess—a unique marker of what distinguishes *me* from other people. Yet, identity is also inescapably communal; it implies an array of relationships and connections with a broader group or community of some kind. To speak about religious identity, cultural identity, or national identity, for example, is to acknowledge that our identity is by nature, something we share with other people. John Zizioulas highlights how community is constitutive of human identity saying, “The human being is *defined* through otherness. It is a being whose identity emerges only in relation to other beings, God, the animals and the rest of creation.”⁴ Thus identity is not mono-dimensional, nor can it exist in a vacuum. Bonnie Miller-McLemore depicts this relational dynamic as a “living human web,” highlighting the various forms of human interconnection. In the same way the threads of a spider’s

³ Marc Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions for Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2006), 4.

⁴ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 39.

web are interconnected, individuals, families, communities, and social systems are inextricably intertwined.⁵

Second, not only is identity comprised of a web of relationships, but it also encompasses a network of beliefs. Identity is a normative, moral framework to guide actions and beliefs. Moral philosopher Charles Taylor says “My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.”⁶

A corollary of this framework of beliefs is that identity is never static; it has past, present and futuristic dimensions. Because certain aspects of our identity are inherited from our cultures, communities, and families, we inevitably build upon the foundation given to us at birth. A significant aspect of identity is the struggle to understand the inheritance of our past and which aspects of this legacy we truly believe or value, while progressively constructing an identity that we deem to be “our own.” Thus as human beings we are always under construction; identity is an unavoidably fluid concept because it is a unique marker of how we define ourselves (or are defined) at any particular moment in our life’s journey.

A final complexity intrinsic to identity is its composition of both healthy and distorted answers to questions of selfhood. Developmental and social psychology demonstrates that an individual, a group, a nation, or a culture defines itself both negatively and positively, over and against some significant other. This propensity to classify based on either real or assumed physical, social, cultural, or religious differences, is, to some degree, an inevitable part of identity formation. Thus, the task of deracinating distorted aspects of identity is not a simple one, since both positive and negative aspects of an individual’s or group’s identity are deeply and complexly entwined.

⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century,” in *Through the Eyes of Women*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996), 9-26.

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27.

II. IDENTITY AND GENOCIDE

To portray how identity is intimately connected with a rejection of otherness, we will explore two phenomena, genocide and sectarianism. The purpose of this analysis is not to detract attention away from the myriad of more “subtle” ways that a rejection of otherness takes place, but to portray the potentiality of distorted identities to breed radical destruction towards the Other. Often these deadly phenomena are deemed either inexplicable occurrences, or hypothesized to be primarily the outgrowth of rampant prejudice and hatred. Here, I explore the contention that skewed conceptions of identity lie at the heart of both genocide and sectarianism.

The word “genocide” from the Greek *genos* (race, tribe) and the Latin *cide* (killing) was coined by Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959), a Polish Jew who wanted to describe the terror he and his family had witnessed and endured during the reign of the Third Reich. Lemkin described genocide as a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at the annihilation of a national or ethnic group. When World War II and the Holocaust ended, Lemkin went on to urge the newly-formed United Nations to pass the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. According to article II, genocide comprises a range of actions

committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁷

At its core then, genocide is about killing members of a tribe or race not because of their individual identity or characteristics (for these are no longer discerned by the perpetrators) but based solely on their perceived, collective group identity.

In his article “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” psychologist David Moshman argues that genocide must be perceived through the lens of identity, in order to truly comprehend its nature. Identity is a crucial factor in any explanation of

⁷ The full text of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is available at http://www.oas.org/dil/1948_Convention_on_the_Prevention_and_Punishment_of_the_Crime_of_Genocide.pdf.

genocide. Moshman defines identity as “a conception of oneself in one’s social context that is sufficiently organized, explanatory, and conscious to be deemed an explicit theory of oneself as a person.”⁸ He asserts,

Genocides are perpetrated by individuals acting collectively on behalf of what they perceive to be their own group against what they perceive to be a different group. At the heart of any genocide, then, are individuals who see themselves in ways that enable them to act collectively on behalf of their own group against another. *At the heart of any genocide, in other words, is identity.*⁹

Fundamentally, genocide is an extreme result of the normal processes of identity formation. In the path toward genocide, Moshman suggests a discernable pattern where identity options are drastically narrowed to two, and then to one. He proposes four phases by which this narrowing takes place: dichotomization, dehumanization, destruction, and denial. These phases are substantially overlapping, not qualitatively distinct stages. The way in which these processes work is illustrated by examples during the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the Latin American wars in the 1970s and 1980s, and the European conquests of the Americas.

The process of dichotomization is the first phase. As previously discussed, human beings cultivate their identity based on a multitude of overlapping dimensions—their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, ideology, political and moral commitments, family and professional roles etc.—some of which are considered more fundamental to their identity than others. Dichotomization happens when a certain dimension of identity becomes so fixed and prominent that other dimensions of identity begin to wane peripheral and secondary. Resultantly, an individual or group may increasingly see themselves as defined by fewer and fewer dimensions of identity until, ultimately, one dimension is underscored above all others; this dominant aspect of identity devolves into the thing which *should* define who people are and who they are not. Moshman warns that when this

⁸ David Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” in *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 7:2, (2007), 118.

⁹ David Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” 116 (emphasis mine). Moshman notes that in attributing genocide to identity, he is not implying that identity necessarily leads to genocide or that no other concepts and factors are important in an explanation of genocide. He does suggest, however, that the concept of identity is crucial to any cogent explanation of genocide.

dichotomization prevails, alternative identities are increasingly marginalized or disparaged. In the end, those who are not *us* are *them*.¹⁰

The path to the Holocaust manifests a gradual process of dichotomization. In general, Jews in early 20th century Germany were highly assimilated, seeing themselves as having individual identities that included, but were not solely defined by their Jewishness. With the proliferation of racist *Judenhass* ideology, Jews became increasingly ostracized and disconnected from society as a whole. Jewishness thus becomes their singular defining quality, regardless of all other dimensions of their identity. Jews in Germany were no longer seen as Jewish Germans but rather German Jews.¹¹ Judaism became replaced by “Jewishness.” As Hannah Arendt put it, “Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape.”¹² In isolating “Jewishness” as an immutable metaphysical quality, this ensured that there would always be a protective barrier between Jews becoming fully assimilated, since even if they converted, they would never really be not-Jewish. They would never be truly German.

Dehumanization is the second dimension on the path to genocide. Here, people who are deemed “them and not us” are denied the status of persons. They are no longer seen as members of the human community with individual identities of their own, but instead are relegated to part of a subhuman (or nonhuman) collective mass, worthy of obliteration.¹³ Moshman highlights the striking similarity that the language of dehumanization employs throughout a wide variety of genocidal contexts. He notes how degradative descriptions, such as weeds, rats, dogs, vermin, maggots, parasites, pests, cockroaches, cancerous cells, heretics, heathens, infidels, subversives, barbarians, or terrorists are utilized to dehumanize the Other. He says,

What all of these conceptualizations have in common is that they restrict the moral universe to “us.” “We” are moral individuals who acknowledge and respect our obligations to each other. “They” are not just different but are not fully persons at all and thus not among those to whom our obligations extend.¹⁴

¹⁰ David Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” in *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 7:2, (2007), 118-119.

¹¹ Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” 120.

¹² Cited in Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 59.

¹³ Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” 121.

¹⁴ Moshman, “Us and Them: Identity and Genocide,” 123.

As this work has accentuated, once the boundaries of moral obligation have been drafted and others are circumscribed to the exterior, ethical commitments extend only to those within our respective circle, to those who share our collective identity. The thick miasma of dehumanization begins to choke out all notions of an ethical responsibility towards the Other, even when the Other is facing extinction. This process of dehumanization was relentless during the Holocaust—as German Jews were increasingly seen solely in terms of their Jewishness—until they came to be seen as less than fully German and, before long, as less than fully human.

Destruction is a third rather obvious phase in the progression of genocide. Destruction refers to genocidal massacres such as the 800,000 killed in Rwanda over the course of 100 days in 1994, or the obliteration of the native populations in the late 15th and 16th century in Hispaniola when Columbus established Spain's first outpost in the New World. Destruction, however, can also be much more subtle than full-scale annihilation; it can transpire through nonlethal, ostensibly progressive social practices. Moshman cites the operation of Native American boarding schools in the U.S. and Canada from the late 19th century until the mid 20th century as illustrative of how seemingly benign practices can be equally effective in destroying cultures and silently extinguishing entire ways of life. The goal of these boarding schools was the elimination of indigenous cultures from white culture and heritage. Native American students were severed from their cultural traditions and forced to take a new white Christian name and assimilate to (white) Christian beliefs and practices. They could no longer dress like Natives nor were they permitted to speak their native tongue. The motto of these residential schools was "Kill the Indian, save the man." The objective was to extract and annihilate what was deemed as the subhuman identity (i.e. the Native identity), while preserving and re-writing the rest. Cases such as these boarding schools are a sobering reminder that more subtle, "non-violent" genocidal processes can be equally effective in silently eradicating people groups from the memory banks of history.¹⁵

The fourth phase, denial, so routinely follows genocidal destruction that Moshman considers it to be genocide's concluding normative phase. This phase can

¹⁵ Moshman, "Us and Them: Identity and Genocide," 125-126.

range from ongoing dehumanization of the victims or blatant rejection of the historical facts, to more nuanced forms of denial such as failure to investigate what really happened, selective remembering, recontextualizing history, or redefining genocide for political purposes.¹⁶ Moshman maintains that in many cases it is precisely one's identity as a moral agent that compels people to deny the identities of those they destroy. Because genocide is conceived of as the most horrific of crimes, and because of the tendency to envision ourselves as ethical creatures within a moral community, there is significant pressure to deny that anything we or our group have done is genocidal, he says.¹⁷

Moshman's contention that "dynamics of identity initiate, guide, and extend the process of genocide,"¹⁸ is an excellent curative to the innate human tendency to see ourselves and our community as contradistinctive from the perpetrators of genocide. Moshman points out how we would all prefer to imagine that genocide is committed by people who are uniquely evil or misanthropic, people who are radically dissimilar to ourselves. Studying genocide through the lens of identity highlights that all human beings possess the essential ingredient necessary to commit genocide: identities.¹⁹

Moshman's research on the link between identity and the pathway to genocide is also significant because it demonstrates there is no easy formula or straightforward technique by which to eradicate genocide. He states, "If genocide were rooted in hatred we could seek to eliminate hate, and we might at least manage to mitigate it. But we cannot eliminate identity, nor would we want to try."²⁰ Moshman closes his article with a sobering challenge; even though the possibility for genocide will always remain, as surely as human beings will continue to cultivate identities, we

¹⁶ For example, Moshman points out how important it was that after the horrors of the Holocaust and the subsequent UN Genocide Convention had promised "Never Again" to avoid using the word genocide to describe the events taking place in Rwanda. Thus, great care was taken to maintain that what was happening in Rwanda was simply a "civil war," not genocide. All subsequent evidence was interpreted accordingly. It was only after hundreds of thousands had been killed that the U.S. was finally willing to concede that 'acts of genocide' had indeed taken place. See David Moshman, "Us and Them: Identity and Genocide," 129.

¹⁷ Moshman, "Us and Them: Identity and Genocide," 127.

¹⁸ Moshman, "Us and Them: Identity and Genocide," 131.

¹⁹ In *The Final Solution: A Genocide*, Donald Bloxham states, "Genocide or ethnic cleansing served the purpose of removing 'problem' groups while simultaneously sharpening and rendering more exclusive the identity of the majority." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41.

²⁰ Moshman, "Us and Them: Identity and Genocide," 132.

must endeavor to resist the treacherous forces of dichotomization, dehumanization, and denial.²¹

Moshman's research on the concatenation between genocide and identity emphasizes the significance of cultivating identities that are multidimensional—and capable of resisting the pernicious forces of dichotomization, dehumanization, destruction, and denial that can so easily become normative. Next, we will explore the role that identity plays in the related phenomenon of sectarianism.

III. IDENTITY AND SECTARIANISM

In *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg describe sectarianism as an extraordinarily complex notion, comprised of both inner and outer aspects. The following statement begins to isolate some of the dynamics of sectarianism:

Sectarianism is about what goes on in people's hearts and minds, and it is about the kind of institutions and structures created in society. It is about people's attitudes to one another, about what they do and say and the things they leave undone and unsaid... 'Sectarian' is usually a negative judgement that people make about someone else's behaviour and rarely a label that they apply to themselves, their own sectarianism always being the hardest to see.²²

Several salient aspects of sectarianism are brought to light here: sectarian propensities are embedded within both individuals and larger structures, sectarianism has the potential to be manifested in attitudes, as well as speech and actions (or in a lack thereof), and it is often extremely difficult for those absorbed in sectarian behavioral patterns to see the plank in their own eye.

Writing in the context of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, Liechty and Clegg outline a detailed definition of sectarianism in hopes of offering a tool to assist in understanding the dynamics of this destructive phenomenon and ultimately provide the resources needed to overcome it. They describe sectarianism as:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 102.

A system of attitudes, actions, beliefs, and structures at personal, communal, and institutional levels which always involves religion, and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics which arises as a distorted expression of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity, and the free expression of difference...²³

At the heart of sectarianism, therefore, lies a “distorted expression of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity, and the free expression of difference.”²⁴ But what do these distorted expressions look like? How do they take shape? Liechty and Clegg say a key characteristic is the tendency to cultivate identity negatively over and against the Other, rather than in a positive relationship which accepts the plurality of the Other. They say of this tendency, “to a degree this is natural and inevitable. At a basic and primitive level, a person or group always knows, in part, what it is by what it is not.”²⁵ Even though the creation of identity over and against is an unavoidable part of the way human beings foster separate identities, if taken too far, it can quickly deteriorate into more lethal practice of sectarianism.

How is it possible to distinguish sectarianism from the basic processes of cultivating identity which are part and parcel of the human experience? A defining trait of sectarianism is the creation of what Marc Gopin calls a “negative identity.”²⁶ The hallmark of a negative identity is that it demands a threatening Other in order to fortify its own identity. Gopin explains,

If identity is essentially negative, if there is deep doubt or lack of vision for conceiving of a substantive identity without the enemy, then there is no choice but to recreate the circumstances in which conflict with an enemy is necessary.²⁷

²³ Liechty and Clegg continue that sectarianism “is expressed in destructive patterns of relating: hardening the boundaries between groups, overlooking others, belittling, dehumanising or demonising others, justifying or collaborating in the domination of others, physically or verbally intimidating or attacking others.” See *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 102. This definition of sectarianism is unpacked in greater detail throughout the rest of the chapter: see pgs. 102-147.

²⁴ *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 102.

²⁵ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 78.

²⁶ Clegg, “Embracing a Threatening Other,” 181. For more on “Negative identity” see Marc Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 3-21 (especially pg. 15).

²⁷ Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 15.

Clegg makes a similar observation. She points out that one of the tragedies of a distorted identity (i.e. an identity which is formed over and against the other), is that it generates a dire need to maintain this threatening other *at all costs*, in order to preserve a stable sense of identity.²⁸ When the menacing Other functions as a necessary safeguard for the preservation of identity— removing this safeguard threatens to destroy the core of one’s very self. Clegg and Liechty portray the devastating effects for those locked this pattern of negative identity:

In this dynamic they find themselves constrained, consciously or unconsciously, to interpret the actions and words of the other mostly in the worst light in order to maintain this identity. Any move to change the status of the other from threatening to friendly, or even to neutral, precipitates some form of identity crisis for them... Thus it becomes a very difficult and painful cycle for people to break.²⁹

How can the cycle of negative identity be shattered? Liechty and Clegg insist we should not endeavor simply to eradicate sectarianism, because this actually poses an increased sense of risk to identity and belonging in those who are behaving in a sectarian way. Instead, to begin moving beyond sectarianism a twofold movement toward a “renegotiation of identities” is needed. First, this movement entails enabling people, on both an individual and corporate level, to connect or reconnect with the positive elements of their identities and then teach them how to express their identity “co-operatively and not in an oppositional way.”³⁰ People behaving in a sectarian manner should be offered ample room to be themselves, as well as assurance that their identity is valued. Clegg explains, “People need to be standing in a secure place in terms of their own identity, before they can risk making space for meaningful connection with the other.”³¹ Second, moving beyond sectarianism requires challenging individuals and groups to recognize and relinquish parts of their identities that have become negatively framed.³²

²⁸ Cecelia Clegg, “Embracing a Threatening Other: Identity and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *International Journal of Public Theology*, vol. 1:2, (2007), 181.

²⁹ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 119.

³⁰ Cecelia Clegg, “Embracing a Threatening Other,” 182.

³¹ Clegg, “Between Embrace and Exclusion,” *New Blackfriars*, 85:995 (2004), 95.

³² Clegg goes on to outline five of many possible approaches for facilitating groups to renegotiate their identities. First, there is a need for safe spaces where people can be respected and heard. Second, a need for affirmation, recognizing, and honoring the positive identity of a group and what they

Liechty and Clegg perceptively explain the role that negatively construed identity plays in fomenting sectarianism, as well as the complexities of moving forward in contexts where sectarianism is the *modus operandi*. They steer us away from simplistic answers, revealing that the process of transcending sectarianism involves “redeeming, transforming, and converting people’s understanding, attitudes, and ultimately the heart of each person as well as societal institutions, where possible.”³³ Liechty and Clegg’s study, along with the work of Moshman on genocide, elucidate the treacherous role that skewed expressions of identity can play in the destruction of the Other. While some might say that sectarianism and genocide are extreme examples, these phenomena reveal how brutality and hatred toward the Other can begin with the small, seemingly innocuous ways that identity is formed over and against the Other. These studies also reveal that all of us, as bearers of identity, have the potential to become perpetrators, in one way or the other.

Concomitantly, these reflections elucidate the indispensability of cultivating inclusive identities; identities which are capable of living with, and learning from, the threatening Other. What might these identities look like? How would they take shape? In what follows, these compelling questions will be explored from the perspective of both individual and ecclesial identity, beginning with the work of Miroslav Volf.

IV. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Chapter one explored Volf’s reflections on the nature of exclusion. The goal of the deleterious practice of exclusion is what he calls a “monochrome world, a world

contribute to society. She notes, “Re-negotiating identities is a vulnerable, painful and confusing time for groups. It is crucial, therefore, that they have a strong sense of the value of their place in society” (p.184). This leads to the third element, which emphasizes the importance of people being stakeholders in this new vision of facilitating change. Fourth, groups locked in a pattern of negative identity formation feed on ignorance, half-truths and myths. Therefore, a critical aspect of identity renegotiation is the introduction of new truths about the Other and the Other’s own story. Finally, Clegg says there is no substitute for new contact, for meeting directly with the Other face to face. These close encounters are indispensable for helping individuals and groups begin to question some fundamental assumptions that shape their identity. See Clegg “Embracing a Threatening Other,” 184-185.

³³ Liechty and Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism*, 121.

without the other.”³⁴ Volf writes in the context of Bosnia and Croatia, where otherness is seen as a “filth that needs to be washed away from the ethnic body, a pollution that threatens the ecology of ethnic space.”³⁵ Volf avers that the challenges of sectarianism, exclusivity, and strife are part of a much larger problem concerning identity and otherness. He reveals the connection between the formation of identity and the terror of exclusion saying, “A tension between the self and the other is built into the very desire for identity.”³⁶ The Other is a threat because of our deep discomfort with anything that muddles our distinct boundaries or rattles our comfortably constructed identities.

This section will explore Volf’s research on the nature of Christian identity. Throughout his work, Volf asks three interrelated questions: who is the Other? Who are we? How should we relate to each other? The answer to each of these questions is inextricably bound up with the question, “What does it mean to be a bearer of identity?” In response to these questions, Volf delineates three main approaches for engaging the complexities of identity and otherness, as well as the ever-present conflicts concomitant with these complexities.

The first approach, which Volf calls the universalist option, advocates curbing the rapid proliferation of differences in society and supports fostering universal or religious values instead, in hopes that these shared universal values will create a secure foundation for harmonious living. This approach postulates that *only* the cultivation of these universal values can guarantee the peaceful co-existence of people. In this perspective, the proliferation of diversity without the presence of shared common values will lead to nothing less than societal bedlam.³⁷

A second option that Volf highlights is the communitarian option. This position embraces heterogeneity and enthusiastically celebrates the richness of diversity in the community. It holds that the spread of universal or religious values will only serve to engender subjugation and uniformity, rather than peace and

³⁴ Judith M. Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf, *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 37.

³⁵ Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29 (1992): 233.

³⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 91.

³⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 20.

prosperity. Thus the search for common shared values among people is seen primarily as an oppressive quest to blot out cultural heterogeneity.

Thirdly, the postmodern option contends that freedom from tyranny can only be found in the radical autonomy of individuals and therefore, society should abandon both universal values and particular identities. Volf states that in this view, “We should create spaces in which person can keep creating ‘larger and freer selves’ by acquiring new and losing old identities.”³⁸

The common denominator among these radically diverse solutions is their emphasis on “social arrangements.” Each proposes a specific manner in which society (or all humanity) should be organized so individuals and groups with diverse identities are enabled to flourish, or at least to live together amicably. In contrast to this approach which is rooted in social arrangements, Volf’s research proposes an alternative.³⁹ He explains,

Instead of reflecting on the kind of society we ought to create in order to accommodate individual or communal heterogeneity, I will explore what kind of selves we need to be in order to live in harmony with others.⁴⁰

This proposal leads to a sustained reflection on identity and proffers some critical questions: How should we as Christians think of identity? How should we relate to the Other? And how should we go about making peace with the Other?

The leitmotif of Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace* is “The will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.”⁴¹ This sentiment does not tout some generic form of pluralism or tolerance, but seeks rather to mine the riches of the Christian faith in order to discover treasures that might enable followers of Jesus to make space for the Other. Volf contends that Christian theology has abundant, invaluable resources for

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Volf focuses on social agents, instead of social arrangements, not because he believes the Christian faith has no bearing on social arrangements, but rather because he is convinced that the task of the theologian is to be concentrating less “on social arrangements and more on fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and crafting just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive.” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 21.

⁴⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 20.

⁴¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

grappling with these thorny issues of otherness and diversity. For example, in Acts 2 we discover that from its conception at Pentecost the church was a uniquely multi-cultural community, a people progressing toward unity amidst cultural diversity by the power of the Spirit inaugurating a new age of God's salvation.⁴² Likewise, the image of the divine Trinity also shines light on the challenge of otherness.⁴³ Kevin Vanhoozer explains, "The doctrine of the Trinity with its dual emphasis on one-ness and three-ness as equally ultimate, contains unexpected and hitherto unexplored resources for dealing with the problems, and possibilities, of contemporary pluralism."⁴⁴ God as perfect unity amidst plurality, challenges human beings to mirror the Trinitarian idea of personhood. Volf states,

Why should I embrace the other? The answer is simple: because the others *are* part of my own true identity. I cannot live authentically without welcoming the others—the other gender, other persons, or other cultures—into the very structure of my being, for I am created to reflect the personality of the triune God.⁴⁵

How might Christians readjust their identities in order to make space for the Other? Volf maintains the answers lies in cultivating the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to it. Rather than an "enclosed identity"⁴⁶ that ardently striving to preserve its purity through exclusion, it is possible instead to construe our identity in a way that always includes the Other. While this radical

⁴² Volf, "A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging," 9.

⁴³ Stanley Grenz also speaks of how otherness is fundamental to the doctrine of the Trinity. He says "This acknowledgment opens the way for an understanding of God as the one in whom Otherness is eternally present, an Otherness that is, in turn, freely given in God's gracious revelation. Hence, it opens the way to the acknowledgment that while God remains always incomprehensible, there is no God 'above' the unity-in-multiplicity disclosed in the revelational saga of the divine name. Furthermore, the divine Otherness means that absolute unity—Oneness apart from Otherness—need no longer be posited as the highest principle of reality. Rather, unity and multiplicity—Oneness and Otherness-demand equal emphasis." See Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 330. As quoted in *Church and Religious 'Other'*, Gerard Mannion, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 6. Also, see John D. Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38:4 (1994): 352.

⁴⁴ Vanhoozer, *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), x.

⁴⁵ Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing', " *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29 (1992): 248.

⁴⁶ This phrase is borrowed from Robert Vosloo's article "Identity, Otherness and the Triune God: Theological Groundwork for a Christian Ethic of Hospitality" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 119 (2004): 69-89

paradigm shift in our conception of identity will be difficult, daunting, and decentering, this inclusive notion of identity is firmly rooted in Scripture. Three biblical metaphors elucidate this notion: the stranger, the pilgrim, and the alien.

Our response to the Other must begin with contemplation upon on our own identity as strangers, says Volf. The stranger is a central biblical metaphor, shining light on how the people of God should live in the world. This metaphor, if properly understood, can help construct identity in a way that fosters both distance and belonging. Volf illustrates this notion with the example of Abraham, whom God summoned to go forth, far away from all that defined him, leaving behind everything familiar and embarking to a strange new land in order to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. “To be a child of Abraham and Sarah” Volf explains, “and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a voyage, become a stranger.”⁴⁷ Volf reflects on the work of Jacob Neusner saying,

The ultimate allegiance of those whose father is Abraham can be only to the God of ‘all families of the earth,’ not to any particular country, culture, or family with their local deities. The oneness of God implies God’s universality, and universality entails transcendence with respect to any given culture.⁴⁸

Marc Gopin advocates a similar stranger-centered approach to identity, pointing to the example of Abraham as paradigmatic of the identity of the stranger who sees himself/herself in service to the world. In “The Heart of the Stranger,” Gopin draws out the theological import of the stranger or sojourner called the *ger* in the Hebrew Bible. The paradigm of the stranger counteracts the gravitation to build our lives solely on “homogenized identities” which Gopin claims “deeply threaten so many people’s commitments to their past, their families and their very sense of self.”⁴⁹ A homogenized identity is one which is myopic toward the value of cultural particularity for the individual and the community. Gopin explores how violence within religious traditions springs from both a universalist stance, which is

⁴⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 39.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 16. A similar concept that Gopin highlights is the notion of consumption: “Consumption lies at the heart of both human existence and human destructiveness, life-giving and death-giving. The need to be all-consuming, to leave no space in which one does not consume, is the real key to human evil.” Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 11.

determined to consume or destroy everything in its path, and from a particularist stance, which has no regard whatsoever for those who are not members of one's own tribe or group. The theological and biblical concept of the stranger is an exemplar for navigating between the Scylla of ignoring the significance of particularity and the Charybdis of radical and undiscerning universalism which would bury the individual in the sea of universal principles. The *ger* or stranger-centered approach to identity is invaluable for learning to embrace particularities and honor them, resisting the ever-present temptation to create the Other in own image. Gopin explains,

The *ger* philosophy...is a theological framework for negotiating a position vis-à-vis the Other that makes neither the universalist, all-consuming error nor the particularist error of chauvinistic dehumanization of the Other. It is a philosophy of seeing others and oneself as sojourners with God on this earthly plane.⁵⁰

An analogous metaphor that is prominent in Scripture and in the Christian tradition is that of a pilgrim. Volf believes this image is appropriate because

a pilgrim is not defined primarily by the land or culture through which he is traveling, but by the place toward which he is going. His primary identity comes from the destination, not from any point along the way. The land Christians are moving toward is God's new world, in which people from all tribes and languages will be gathered. Being a pilgrim does not exclude a whole range of secondary identities.⁵¹

Volf contends that the Christian understanding of being a pilgrim does not preclude the possibility of having a whole range of secondary identities, but it does demand that these identities are truly subordinated to the central identity, i.e. being one who is on a journey toward God's new world.

A third constructive metaphor Volf offers for cultivating distance and belonging is that of aliens. A number of biblical passages, such as the exhortation found in 1 Peter 2:11,⁵² evidence that by the time the New Testament period came to a close the

⁵⁰ Gopin, "The Heart of the Stranger," 20.

⁵¹ Volf, "Living with the Other," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39 (2002), 22.

⁵² 1 Peter 2:11 (NRSV): "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul."

early Christian community underwent a radical shift of loyalty; they quite consciously construed their own identity in terms of “aliens” and “exiles.”⁵³ Volf says,

At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures. A response to a call from that God entails rearrangement of a whole network of allegiances.... Departure is part and parcel of Christian identity.⁵⁴

These concepts of being a stranger, a pilgrim, an alien, i.e. fundamentally Other, were integral to early Christian and ecclesial identity and bear considerable import for Christians today. For those who make the biblical narrative their own, Jesus Christ is the stranger, the pilgrim, the alien, par excellence. He is epicentral for the formation of our identity as individuals and as Christian community. Volf explains: “At the root of Christian self-understanding as aliens and exiles lies not so much the story of Abraham and his posterity as the destiny of Jesus Christ, his mission, and his rejection, which brought him to the cross.”⁵⁵

Jesus lived as a despised and rejected stranger of this alienated and estranged world. So too, says Volf, “reciprocal foreignness and estrangement” are essential elements for a Christian’s identity.⁵⁶ As followers of Jesus we should expect no less than to walk in the footsteps of our Lord: “It is therefore not a matter of indifference for Christians whether or not to be ‘strangers’ in their own culture; to the extent that one’s own culture has been estranged from God, distance from it is essential to Christian identity.”⁵⁷

Disciples of this alienated Savior, then, must undergo a profound paradigm shift when it comes to the formation of identity. This entails eschewing the temptation to possess a pure national, cultural, racial, or ethnic identity— because all human beings are creatures of the one God. Volf asserts that “faith in Christ replaces

⁵³ Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29 (1992): 236.

⁵⁴ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*. 40.

⁵⁵ Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29 (1992): 236.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Miroslav Volf, “A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict,” *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 198.

birth into a people.”⁵⁸ He recounts what this exchange looks like: “In the case of Christians, superimposed on the center that creates their human identity is another center that creates their Christian identity.”⁵⁹

Even though the Christian no longer gives ultimate allegiance to a cultural, national, or ethnic identity, Volf is careful to nuance that having proper distance from a culture does not simply transport a Christian out of that culture wholesale. Even though distance from one’s own culture is indispensable to Christian identity, the distance that results from being born of the Spirit is not an escapist, isolating kind of distance, but rather a distance that creates space for the Other within oneself. Thus,

Christians are not the insiders who have taken flight to a new ‘Christian culture’ and become outsiders to their own culture; rather when they have responded to the call of the Gospel they have stepped, as it were, with one foot outside their own culture while with the other remaining firmly planted in it. They are distant, and yet they belong.⁶⁰

By highlighting the significance of being an Other, an alien, one walking in the footsteps of the quintessential pilgrim Jesus, Volf’s work elucidates some critical dynamics of how Christians might begin to make room within the boundaries of their identities for the Other

V. IDENTITY AND BOUNDARIES OF BELONGING

There are two imperative elements for an inclusive identity that make space for the Other. First, we must have boundaries. While *prima facie* this seems antithetical to the concept of inclusivity, boundaries are in fact the *sine qua non* of identity.

Without boundaries, the concept of identity would be impossible—the result would be undifferentiated chaos. Volf explains,

⁵⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 45.

⁵⁹ Volf, “A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging,” 47.

⁶⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 49.

Boundaries must remain, because without boundaries you have non-order, and non-order is not the end of oppression but the end of life. What must be abolished are the false boundaries which pervert an order that sustains and nourishes human life, shaping it into a system of exclusions that degrades and destroys it.⁶¹

Within the creation story in the Hebrew Scriptures, we see that God creates and God separates. Here we see that God calls good, both the distinction of boundaries, as well as the maintenance of boundaries.

Secondly, in order for boundaries to be positive, they must be permeable and flexible. Boundaries cannot be constructed simply to keep foreign and foreboding things out; they must also exist in order to permit things to enter. In an age where rapidly burgeoning plurality threatens the fragility of religious traditions and communal boundaries, it seems quite improvident for a community to *intentionally* allow for and even embrace multiplicity in their midst. In light of these destabilizing times, the lure to reinforce boundaries and make them more defined and impenetrable is powerful. The necessary antidote to this enticement is the cultivation of porous, flexible boundaries. These boundaries are not self-enclosed but rather are shaped in openness to the Other. With the act of relinquishing rigid boundaries, we are able to receive one another, maintaining our unique identities and stories, while making space to connect with the stories of the Other.⁶²

As Christians, born out of allegiance to God, the notion that we are no longer responsible for safeguarding the boundaries of our identity should be incredibly liberating! Volf declares, "For Christians, the guardian at the boundaries of identity is Christ, and the self inhabited by Christ is therefore committed to making the story of Jesus Christ his or her own story."⁶³ With Christ as the custodian of the boundaries of our identity, we can participate in the intrepid motion of embracing the Other without dread of what may become of us. This courage comes from knowing that when we make room within ourselves and within our world for the divine Other to dwell, we enable the Other to enrich our identity and to become a part of who we are. Volf encapsulates this process saying,

⁶¹ Volf, "A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 202.

⁶² For more on boundaries see Volf, "Living with the Other," especially pg. 14.

⁶³ Volf, "Living with the Other," 23.

Christian identity is taken out of our own hands and placed into the hands of the divine Other, and by this it is both radically unsettled and unassailably secured. Because Christ defines our identity in the primary way, Christians can confidently set on a journey with proximate others and engage without fear in the give-and-take of the relationship with others that marks an inclusive identity.⁶⁴

The work of Marc Gopin also stresses the significance of boundaries. Gopin claims that respect for boundaries of separate existence is critical for appreciation of the Other. Too often, boundaries are criticized as the root of religious and political conflicts, but Gopin depicts the danger of idolatry when boundaries are absent saying, “Where there is no boundary there is no recognition of anything but the self. Where there is nothing but the self there is only demonic destruction and self-worship.”⁶⁵

Even though boundaries are critically important, a prominent theme in Gopin’s work is the need to traverse across boundaries, a movement that he avers reflects God’s own activity on behalf of human beings. He points to the way that God’s own image is resonant within human beings as “testimony to the phenomenon of sojourning across boundaries at the very core of God’s relation to the world.”⁶⁶

This notion of God’s own image reflected within human beings brings an interesting point to light. Throughout the work, I have argued that there is a pathology deep within the human heart to fear and reject the Other, a pathology so innate and pervasive that it can be said to be imbedded in our very DNA. However, if human beings do indeed possess the *imago dei*, as described in Gen. 1:26-27, et al., then the disposition of the Triune God to sojourn across boundaries could also be said to be a fundamental part of our constitution as human beings, however latent within human beings this disposition may be.

Geraldine Smyth also notes how boundaries that strengthen a sense of identity must be opened up and transcended:

The journey into self-understanding requires that we see ourselves with greater depth. We need somehow to stand outside ourselves. Identity is

⁶⁴ Volf, “Living with the Other,” 22.

⁶⁵ Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 11.

⁶⁶ Gopin, “The Heart of the Stranger,” 9

intrinsically complex or many-in-one; it is disclosed in journeying far from home; in order to become itself, it must encounter what is deemed other and different. So too, the formation of identity is related to one's capacity to act and embody a theory or vision.⁶⁷

She describes the inherent “fight or flight” impulse to defend ourselves and fortify the boundary when we as human beings encounter the strangeness of another. Speaking from within the context of her work with the peace process in Northern Ireland, Smyth laments how the churches have not been at the forefront in sustaining relationships of shared life. Instead, “Their relationships have been more characterized by the manner of boundary-keeping in regard to their own identity, minimalist in creating opportunities for contact and celebrations of common lament or intercession.”⁶⁸ Smyth indicates there is a grave danger when group boundaries are rigidly demarcated by insider and outsider. She says,

Where the other is perceived as [an] ever-encroaching threat, the boundary itself becomes the repository of identity, and culture is driven by fears for security. In such fraught settings, survival and defiance inevitably become the normative *modus vivendi*.⁶⁹

How do we keep boundaries from becoming a negative repository of identity? Smyth believes the Gospel of Mark offers invaluable insights. Here we find Jesus habitually traversing across intransigent cultural boundaries between Jews and Samaritans and Jews and Gentiles, in addition to well-solidified boundaries of gender and social status. Smyth finds Jesus’ frequent lake crossings especially significant, because they demonstrate his continual movement between the familiar and the alien territory on the far side: “one agrees that Jesus’ mission was deeply shaped by the ‘double bind’ within his own tradition of particularity and universality, and like other prophets before him, it cost him his life.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Smyth, “Churches in Ireland: Journeys in Identity and Communion,” *Ecumenical Review* 53:2 (April 2001): 160.

⁶⁸ Smyth, “Respecting Boundaries and Bonds: Journeys of Identity and Beyond,” in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, ed. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 153.

⁶⁹ Smyth, “Respecting Boundaries and Bonds: Journeys of Identity and Beyond,” 147.

⁷⁰ Smyth, “Respecting Boundaries and Bonds: Journeys of Identity and Beyond,” 153-154. See the rest of the article for more of her perspective on reading the Gospel of Mark from the viewpoint of boundary-crossing.

The work of Volf, Gopin, and Smyth illustrates both the importance of flexible boundaries and boundary crossing for the creation of dynamic, multi-dimensional identities and that the Christian faith has rich resources for the creation of such identities, characterized by both distance and belonging. Distance not only creates space in *individuals* for the Other, but this distance born of the Spirit also creates *communities* of embrace—communities which Volf portrays as “places where the power of the Exclusion System has been broken and from where the divine energies can flow, forging rich identities that include the other.”⁷¹ The chapter that follows will return to Volf’s research, particularly his profound metaphor of embrace and its potentiality for ecclesiology. Next we turn to the *Groupe des Dombes* and their illuminating reflections on identity and the importance of conversion.

VI. IDENTITY AND CONVERSION

The *Groupe des Dombes*, founded in 1937, is a group of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians, dedicated to overcoming spiritual and theological alienation which can be devastatingly divisive for churches. A 1993 paper titled, *For the Conversion of the Churches* makes some significant proposals toward the unity of the churches by reflecting on the paradoxical nature of the identity of Christian churches. The paper sketches out three distinct, yet interrelated expressions of identity which constitute church: individual Christian identity, ecclesial identity, and confessional identity. Viewing three strands of identity from these unique angles or lenses enables us to discern the subtle nuances of identity more clearly.

At its core, each communion has a substantial Christian identity, which is the indispensable essence of its identity. The paper describes individual Christian identity simply as belonging to Christ, a belonging initiated by repentance and the gift of baptism, and lived out by faith. This is, however, by no means the sum total of Christian identity. *For the Conversion of the Churches* emphasizes that Christian identity is living and dynamic, never static:

⁷¹ Volf, “A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging,” 60.

It is a shifting of the centre, an exodus, a transition, a paschal movement. Christian identity is always Christian becoming. It is an opening up to an eschatological beyond which ceaselessly draws it forward and prevents it from shutting itself up in itself. Thus it is a radical opening up to others beyond all walls of separation. In its very essence it therefore contradicts the fixed or intransigent need for secure identity.⁷²

This understanding of Christian identity as dynamic stands in stark contrast to many traditional theories that maintain that identity needs to be firmly fixed or immutable in order to be safeguarded and unassailable. Christian identity is thus a perpetual journey, never simply a destination.

Ecclesial identity can be described as the unique personality of Christian identity, developed over the course of history (e.g. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, etc.). It signifies “the belonging or participation of an individual or of a confessional church in the one, holy ‘catholic’ and apostolic church.”⁷³ Ecclesial identity labors tirelessly for catholicity, meaning catholic in the original sense of the word—full and universal.⁷⁴ This identity is described as “an eschatological gift”⁷⁵ because it is both already present and not yet perfected. As such, ecclesial identity is the goal of the ecumenical movement. Yet amidst this “not yet perfected state” there comes an ineluctable tension: “we must acknowledge that the church is the place of an encounter where God’s faithfulness and human unfaithfulness cannot be disentangled.”⁷⁶ Because the catholicity of the churches is a “wounded” one, the notion of ecclesial identity entails vast room for conversion, for the church always being reformed in order to more faithfully carry out its *raison d’être*.

Finally, the third strand, confessional identity, lies in the specific historical, cultural, and doctrinal way in which Christian and ecclesial identities are lived out and embodied.⁷⁷ Confessional identity is shaped by theological beliefs, as well as by

⁷² Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1993), 20.

⁷³ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁷ The paper points out that some churches, most notably the Roman Catholic Church, would reject this distinction between ecclesial and confessional identities. The RCC, for example, claims that their

attributes of church life such as ecclesial structure, liturgical and devotional practices, and moral stances. It is the unique, historical context of a church, the specific spiritual and doctrinal profile which distinguishes it from other churches. As such, each confessional identity is *sui generis*. This third category of identity is important because it recognizes that all churches are contextually situated realities; every church has a history and ecclesial identities are shaped and expressed in ways that are unique to their social, political, national, and cultural milieu. What makes confessional identity unavoidably complex is that it is comprised of both very positive elements of identity, as well as by negative aspects—aspects of identity which are deeply marred by sin.

In the midst of these unique expressions of confessional identity, the paper goes on to emphasize, “To be genuine in Christian terms, a confessional identity must include fullness and universality.”⁷⁸ Without this universality, churches run the risk of adopting confessional identities that become “crystallized in history” and are disconnected from the larger Christian tradition that is the lifeblood of the church. There is a grave danger when these confessional identities become ends in and of themselves; they become severed from the precious communal heritage of the Christian faith. The upshot is negativity and aggressiveness towards the way other communities embody Christian and ecclesial identities; this leads away from a healthy confessional allegiance, rooted in the recognition of belonging to an historic church, toward a more carcinogenic confessionalism, which is “the hardening of confessional identity into an attitude of self-justification.” *For the Conversion of the Churches* continues with this description, “Confessionalism, also called ‘denominationalism’ withdraws into itself and rejects real confrontation with other confessions or denominations.”⁷⁹

Ultimately, confessional identity can only be called authentically Christian when it remains faithful to its truth and converts constantly to the gospel, by seeking mutual understanding and pursuing full communion with other confessional

confessional identity *is* ecclesial identity and sees itself as that in which the one church of Christ subsists. The RCC does not accept being regarded as one Christian confession among others.

⁷⁸ Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24. The text specifically names Northern Ireland as an extreme example where the negative, sin-marked features of confessional identity become absolutized to the contradiction of Christian identity and gospel love (p. 25).

communities, treating them as brothers and sisters and refusing to condemn them in spite of their particularities and peculiarities.

After sketching these three levels of identity in the church, *For the Conversion of the Churches* connects these three facets of identity with the theologically rich concept of conversion, challenging divided churches to recognize that their identity is grounded in a continual process of conversion, without which their unity can never be realized. Foundational to this concept of conversion is the notion that the quest for identity is interminable. “A living identity is never in fact perfected: it is always under construction. Only the future will disclose our identity conclusively.”⁸⁰ Identity and conversion are thus interdependent:

Far from excluding each other, identity and conversion call for each other: there is no Christian identity without conversion; conversion is a constitutive of the Church; our confessions do not merit the name of Christian unless they open up to the necessity of conversion.⁸¹

The New Testament word, *metanoia*, which is translated “conversion” or “repentance” most commonly connotes individual Christian conversion or “the response of faith to the call that comes to us from God through Christ.”⁸² However, the paper contends that the same principles for the conversion of individual identity also apply to collective and social identities. Here, conversion is meant to signify not only “interior dispositions and personal behavior, but also the manner in which ecclesial institutions function...”⁸³

Highlighting ecclesial identity as a distinct category of identity draws our attention to the reality that this “constant conversion” is not merely an individual affair but a vital corporate endeavor as well. It is a process which “opens up a large area for conversion.”⁸⁴ While ecclesial identity has the same basic content as individual Christian conversion, its purpose is described as,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁸¹ Ibid., 15.

⁸² Ibid., 29.

⁸³ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

The effort required from the whole church and from all the churches for them to be renewed and become more capable of fulfilling their mission in accordance with the motto *ecclesia semper reformanda*.⁸⁵

Ecclesial identity is thus the communal effort of the churches to “strive towards its Christian identity;”⁸⁶ this endeavor is carried out through a continual turn toward God and humankind. The inescapably communal nature of ecclesial identity compels the churches to turn their gaze beyond themselves and toward others, through acts of confession, humility, and a persistent process of renewal, whereby the ecclesial community contends against sinful attitudes and structures in a continuous movement to fulfill their ecclesial mission.

Finally, confessional conversion elucidates a particular aspect of ecclesial conversion that takes place in milieus of dissention and estrangement. It is the ecumenical efforts of the still-divided churches in laboring to restore full communion with one another.⁸⁷ What specifically does this process of conversion entail? The answer to this question will vary greatly based on each church’s unique confessional identity. Throughout the course of history, each denomination and each parish has inherited a rich tapestry of confessional characteristics: customs, devotional practices, traditions, and rituals. Interwoven within this tapestry is an inheritance of both positive, life-giving aspects of identity, as well as unhealthy or sinful dimensions of identity which must be abandoned for the sake of a life-giving, converted identity. Confessional conversion is the task whereby the churches turns inward and through the process of discernment seek to determine what values have become embedded within their identity that are not foundational to the Christian core. In essence, which of these family heirlooms are dispensable and can be sacrificed for the sake of unity, for the healing of the church?

The process of confessional conversion is, therefore, a strengthening of Christian and ecclesial identity through the purification of confessional identity: “confessional identities become a gracious gift from God for the whole church from the moment they enter the common quest for a fullness of truth and faithfulness that

⁸⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 27-8.

transcends them all.”⁸⁸ Confessional conversion begins with conversion to God, through Jesus Christ, and subsequently results in reconciliation among the churches as they seek a more full and rich communion with one another.

Might this process of purifying confessional identity also enable churches to enjoy a more full and rich communion with the Other as well? Could conversion entail rooting out unhealthy and sinful dimensions of identity in order for churches to make space in their traditions and unique contexts for otherness? Could the call for reconciliation be extended even beyond the walls of the Christian community, beckoning churches to be a people who understand deeply the cost of exclusion, and the deleterious trajectory that a rejection of the Other can take? As elucidated throughout this work, when fear of the Other guides the practices of the church, whether consciously or not, the church’s prophetic voice on behalf of the weak and voiceless is nullified—the church ceases to live up to its calling as the church of Jesus Christ.

For the Conversion of the Churches reminds us that confessional conversion is a continual “struggle conducted in grace against all forms of sin, personal and collective.”⁸⁹ Conversion is a sustained motion of turning ourselves toward God *and* toward other human beings, even the frightening Other. Without this movement away from self and toward the Other, Christian identity and Christian communities will grow stagnant and lifeless.⁹⁰ This movement of conversion may require a radical reconstruction of Christian identity, on both an individual and communal level. Perhaps some current definitions of self and of church will need to be shattered and re-conceptualized in order to fix our gaze on the visage of the Other and to make space for otherness within ourselves.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter has delineated some foundational dynamics of Christian identity and ecclesial identity, paying special attention to how identities become distorted, such as in the case of sectarianism and genocide. It also explored the significance of flexible,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁰ Not only will Christian identities and communities grow stagnant and lifeless without this movement away from self—but also potentially toxic, as the research of Clegg, Liechty and Moshman reveal.

porous boundaries of identity and sojourning across boundaries in a manner reflective of the *Imago Dei*. The chapter probed valuable resources within the Christian faith for the cultivation of multi-dimensional identities which are characterized by both distance and belonging. Finally, it explored the connection between the conversion of Christian and ecclesial identity and reconciliation with the Other—both the Other within and outwith the Christian church.

The ensuing chapter will build upon the groundwork laid here in an effort to envision more clearly what the cultivation of this kind of inclusive identity might look like, particularly for ecclesiology. The chapter will suggest some ecclesial characteristics and practices which might enable churches to contend better with the propensity to ignore, avoid, or erase the Other. These suggestions will be guided by the question of how identity might be fostered in such a way that Christians are enabled not only to care for the Other, but to have a genuine relationship with the Other.

CHAPTER V: PROPOSALS FOR POST-HOLOCAUST ECCLESIOLOGY

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the church is called to rethink its teachings not only about Judaism, but about Christian doctrine itself. What is it we are being called to witness to, and how are we to witness? What does God want the Christian church to be in this world?¹

In this work I have surveyed the Christian post-Holocaust theological landscape, the concepts of exclusion, otherness, identity, and the insidious implications for ecclesiology when a rejection of otherness becomes the *modus operandi* for the churches. By interfacing the pervasive impulse to exclude the Other with reflections from post-Holocaust theology, I brought to light some problematic tendencies which are discernible within ecclesial statements and Holocaust theology, in spite of laudable efforts toward reform.

Here I will suggest a few ecclesial characteristics and practices in light of the deep-seated propensity toward a rejection of otherness and its debilitating ramifications for the church. Christian practices are at the heart of the Gospel, the “medium through which we act out our moral values and by which they are evaluated.”² Such Christian practices can only be ethical, relevant, and faithful to the crux of the Gospel if they take seriously the challenge of diversity and otherness.

It is important to note that this final chapter does not intend to be comprehensive in any way; I will not endeavor to construct a theoretical model of church vis-à-vis the Other, nor will space allow for investigation into but a fraction of the wealth of treasures to be mined within Christianity theology for this task. My hope is simply to delineate to a few significant theological characteristics and

¹ Victoria Barnett, “The Message and the Means: Some Historical Reflections on the ‘Good News’,” in *Good News After Auschwitz*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth eds. (Mercer University Press: Macon, 2001), 137.

² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187. Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass describe Christian practices as “Things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.” The authors note that this definition would be strengthened by the addition of the words “in Jesus Christ” at the end, which would help clarify the content and character of these practices. Dykstra and Bass continue, “Thinking of a way of life as made up of a constitutive set of practices breaks a way of life down into parts that are small enough to be amenable to analysis, both in relation to contemporary concerns and as historic, culture-spanning forms of Christian faith and life.” See “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, 18.

practices which might be useful resources for churches to begin the struggle against the propensity to reject, silence, and erase the Other.

Building on the groundwork of the previous chapters, I will highlight three interconnected Christian practices which might offer a concrete starting point to enable Christian communities to make space for otherness and to cultivate an authentic relationship with the Other qua Other. These are (1) the practice of embrace, building on Volf's beautiful metaphor of embrace; (2) the practice of solidarity and the augmentation of the churches' boundaries of moral obligation to include an ethical responsibility toward the Other; and (3) the practice of hospitality which offers radical welcome to the stranger.

In what follows, I will briefly describe the broad contours of these Christian practices: their theological underpinnings, their potential as a resource to enable churches to make authentic space for the Other, and what is at stake if these practices are ignored. I have intentionally avoided sketching the specific dynamics of how these practices might take shape contextually, nor have I offered any kind of formulaic step-by-step process by which these practices might be incorporated and embodied within a particular ecclesial community seeking to grapple with a rejection of otherness. While the reader may find such lack of specificity vexing and impractical, to flesh out these practices with great precision might risk the project becoming a hegemonic enterprise and greatly limit the significance and applicability of the work to my own (very limited) vantage point.

The particularities of how these practices might take form and the process of incorporation will vary greatly depending on the unique, historical character of the concrete ecclesial community—since a rejection of otherness will look radically different depending on the specific dynamics of the ecclesial context. It is the task of the local church, through the creative, pastoral work of listening and discernment to inquire, “Who is the Other, the alienated, the person invisible or pushed to the margins of *our* community?” There is no “one size fits all” Other, although certainly there are specific kinds of people who tend to be much more vulnerable to marginalization and stigmatization than others. Thus, such questions regarding who is *our* Other, the one whom God has called us to embrace and be changed by, requires a nuanced and perceptive approach which can only be answered dialogically

and contextually from within the concrete, local congregation as it stands in real time and space. It is hoped that these practices, drawn from Volf and a variety of other theological sources, might help to initiate and facilitate such dialogue and discernment.

I. The Practice of Embrace

The first practice we will explore is the practice of embrace of the Other, a posture which might enable individuals and particularly Christian churches to risk welcoming the frightening Other, rather than recoiling. Embrace is both a characteristic of a congregation seeking to be open to the Other, as well as an ecclesial practice, in the sense that a posture of embrace must be continually rehearsed in the life of the ecclesial community. Embrace will be foundational for our exploration of the practices of solidarity and hospitality that follows.

Volf's work *Exclusion and Embrace* is primarily centered on questions of individual identity, such as *what kind of selves must we become in order to have room in our identities for the Other?* His reflections also have great potential for ecclesiology, however, if local congregations begin to be guided by the question: *what kind of church must we become in order to make space for the Other in our identities and in our ways of being Christian community?*

A. THE NEED FOR EMBRACE

The powerful image of embrace and its imperative for ecclesiology can only be understood against the backdrop of the persistent battle against the primordial powers of exclusion, a struggle from which churches are by no means exempt. Throughout this work, I have delineated the deleterious nature of exclusion and its potential to vitiate the church's prophetic voice on behalf of the vulnerable and persecuted. In spite of the deep-seated tendency to exclude the Other and preserve the purity of our self-enclosed world, exclusion cannot be the *modus vivendi* for Christian communities, for the practice of exclusion stands as a stark counter-testimony to the reconciling work of the Spirit of God. Volf declares, "The warped system of

exclusion...must be dismantled in the name of an order of things which God, the creator and sustainer of life, 'has made clean'."³

How can churches cultivate such inclusive identities amidst tribalism, sectarianism, nationalism, and a host of other competing claims for loyalty and belonging? The previous chapter explored the biblical metaphors of strangers, aliens, and pilgrims, which help to illumine how this balanced stance between distance and belonging might be possible for those who understand they are sojourners "with one foot outside their own culture."⁴ Volf challenges Christians to resist what he calls the "sacralization of cultural identity,"⁵ whereby cultural, national, ethnic, and political identity is demarcated over and against the Other, making embrace of the Other a veritable impossibility.

Why should we embrace the Other? Volf avers that the Other is an inextricable part of our own true identities—thus we simply cannot live authentically without welcoming the Other into ourselves, for we were created to reflect the very life of the Triune God.⁶ Without embrace as a defining characteristic of our identity, we fail to fulfill our vocation as human beings created in the *Imago Dei*. Furthermore, when those gathered in community for worship and service in the name of the unity-in-diversity Triune God, refuse to make space in themselves for the Other, they fail to live out a fundamental aspect of their calling as church, for to exist as an ecclesial community *incurvatus in se* is a denial of the very Spirit who empowers the church to traverse boundaries and break through barriers which have been erected by enmity and exclusion. Against this impulse to expel the Other from one's community, the Spirit of embrace cultivates communities where genuine embrace is possible—fellowships where the Herculean powers of exclusion might be vanquished, and where rich, multifaceted identities which include the Other are capable of flourishing.

³ Miroslav Volf, "A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict," *The Ecumenical Review* 47:2 (1995), 202.

⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 49. Volf contends, "In the case of Christians, superimposed on the center that creates their human identity is another center that creates their *Christian* identity. Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29:2 (Spring 1992), 239.

⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 49.

⁶ Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29:2 (1992), 248.

B. THE DRAMA OF EMBRACE

Volf believes that the resources to enable an embrace of the Other are located at the heart of the Christian faith—in the narrative of the cross of Christ, which patently reveals the character of the Triune God. He explicates what God's self-donation might mean for the construction of identity and for a relationship with the Other. The ability to embrace the Other, even the enemy, is not the result of mere fortitude or willpower, nor of clever programs and strategies; it flows directly from the self-giving love of the Triune God and "God's reception of hostile humanity into divine communion."⁷ Volf's metaphor of embrace seeks to draw attention to "the mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity, the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross for the 'godless', and the open arms of the 'father' receiving the 'prodigal'."⁸ He explains,

Embrace, I believe, is what takes place between the three persons of the Trinity, which is a divine model of human community. The Johannine Jesus says: "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38). The one divine person is not that person only, but includes the other divine persons in itself, it is what it is only through the indwelling of the other. The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell him; without this interiority of the Father and the Spirit, there would be no Son. Every divine Person *is* the other persons, but he is the other persons in his own particular way.⁹

Paul's exhortation to the churches in Rome to "Welcome one another, therefore, *just as Christ has welcomed you*,"¹⁰ encapsulates the meaning of embrace. Volf says, "In the presence of the divine Trinity, we need to strip down the drab gray of our self-enclosed selves and cultures and embrace others so that their bright colors, painted on our very selves, will begin to shine."¹¹ Because the God that Christians worship is the God of unconditional, vulnerable love—even love towards enemies, the will to embrace the Other, even at great cost, is a fundamental obligation for Christian communities who wish to demonstrate the love of Christ in a world torn asunder by division, conflict, suspicion, and hostility.

⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 100.

⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 100.

¹⁰ Romans 15:7 (NRSV), emphasis mine.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of 'Ethnic Cleansing'," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29:2 (1992), 248.

Volf's beautiful metaphor provides an invaluable resource for how churches might begin to participate in the drama of embrace—to approach the Other, not in an attempt to dominate, assimilate, convert, or in any way remake him or her into their own image, but rather seeking to make space for a genuine encounter which allows the diverseness of the Other to become part of themselves. Volf describes embrace this way:

An embrace involves always a double movement of aperture and closure. I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. The open arms are a sign of discontent at being myself only and of desire to include the other. They are an invitation to the others to come in and feel at home with me, to belong to me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the others—not tightly, so as to crush and assimilate them forcefully into myself, for that would not be an embrace but a concealed power-act of exclusion; but gently, so as to tell them that I do not want to be without them in their otherness. I want them to remain independent and true to their genuine selves, to maintain their identity and as such become part of me so that they can enrich me with that they have and I do not.¹²

His metaphor details a fourfold movement of embrace; each structural element (or “act”) in the process is worth examining more closely.

Act one: *opening* the arms. This move indicates the desire to reach out to the Other, beyond oneself, signaling a discontent with my own self-enclosed identity. The act of opening my arms is a sign that “I have *created space* in myself for the other to come in and that I have made a movement out of myself so as to enter the space created by the other.”¹³ The open arms are an invitation, “Like a door left opened for an expected friend, they are a call to come in.”¹⁴

Act two: *waiting*. The Other cannot be forced to accept my invitation, thus waiting at the boundary of the Other is crucial. Such waiting entails patience, vulnerability, and a great risk of rejection. “If embrace takes place, it will always be because the other has desired the self just as the self has desired the other.”¹⁵ Thus, a posture of waiting is a sign that I desire reciprocity, in contrast to coercion or

¹² Miroslav Volf and Judith M. Gundry Volf. *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 58-59.

¹³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 141.

¹⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 142.

¹⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 143.

violence; it indicates that I am committed to respecting and protecting the identity and boundaries of the Other.

Act three: *closing the arms*. Volf says closing the arms is the goal of a free and mutually-giving embrace. After the Other steps into the embrace, there is a reciprocal indwelling—not to be confused with disappearing or assimilation (or what Volf refers to as a “bear hug”). In an embrace, the boundaries of my identity are firmly safeguarded, allowing both parties to be preserved and transformed by the encounter. Here, says Volf, “The alterity of the other is both affirmed as alterity and partly received into the ever changing identity of the self.”¹⁶ In this act of embrace, I do not seek to master the Other, or devise a stratagem to “figure the Other out,” but rather I embrace the Other on his or her own terms, allowing his or her identity to deepen my own.

Act four: *opening the arms*. In the final movement, arms are once more opened; because the two identities have not merged or been neutralized by one another, the Other can be let go and their dynamic identity may be preserved. We let go, says Volf, “enriched by the traces that the presence of the other has left.”¹⁷ Thus, even though we still remain ourselves, it is impossible to leave the drama of embrace unaffected, for embrace inevitably entails reaching out to the Other and finding a place for the Other within ourselves.

When reflecting upon the metaphor of embrace, it is important to eschew any romanticized notions about the Other. In Volf’s work, “the Other” does not merely imply a mysterious person or a pleasant stranger with whom we share cultural and material goods. The Other can also be malevolent and powerful enemies, thirsty for blood, for example, the *Cetnik*, in Volf’s Serbian context. The Other might be the one who, if welcomed into our community and our lives, we fear might destroy us. And yet the call of the Crucified Lord beckons us to love even those bloodthirsty enemies, those bent on our destruction. How is this possible? It is not achieved by means of human agendas or sheer resolve, but through a seed of embrace implanted in our hearts by the Spirit of God. Volf says, “We must be gripped by a vision of a new world, of that City of Embrace whose ‘architect and builder is God’ (Heb.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 145.

11:10), in which all peoples would retain their identity and yet be enriched in communion with other peoples.”¹⁸

It is also important to note that the drama of embrace is an extremely muddled affair—it is never as fluid of a movement or as seamless of a process as Volf’s imagery seems to suggest here. Amidst the muck and mire of human brokenness, the reality is that embrace is often a movement full of false starts, of being half-open and half-closed toward the Other, of venturing out in moments of intrepidity and then cowering back again in fear as the presence of the Other becomes simply more than we can bear. This inevitable ebb and flow of approaching and then recoiling from the Other is part and parcel of the practice of embrace in a world full of terrifying otherness. Unless we are cognizant of the fumbling, stumbling nature of embrace, we will continue to strive after an ideal instead of participate in the actual messiness of embrace.

C. A COMMUNITY OF EMBRACE

We must not underestimate how disconcerting and daunting an embrace of the Other can be, nor should we discount the significance of this practice as a communal, rather than simply an individual endeavor—for who is truly able on the basis of their own fortitude and willpower to venture out to embrace the threatening Other?

Unfortunately, Volf does not delineate in any great depth how his reflections might be pertinent for the whole community of the church and his reflections on individual Christian identity might imply that we are all simultaneously but separately striving to embrace the Other—a prospect which is simply too terrifying in isolation. While his reflections on how embrace might take place in an ecclesial context are sparse, Volf does offer some hints on how his work might be pertinent for the ecclesial community.

¹⁸ Miroslav Volf, “A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict,” *The Ecumenical Review* 47:2 (1995), 204-205. Volf says, “In the name of God and God’s promised world, there is a reality that is more important than the culture to which we belong. It is God and the new world that God is creating, a world in which people from every nation and every tribe with their cultural goods, will gather around the triune God, a world in which every tear will be wiped away and ‘pain will be no more’ (Revelation 21:3).” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 50-51.

The Spirit of God disrupts the self-enclosed communities we have created and cultivates genuine space in us to receive the Other, initiating a journey toward becoming what Volf calls a “‘catholic personality,’ a personal microcosm of the eschatological new creation.”¹⁹ A catholic personality is a personality enriched by otherness, deeply shaped by encounters with multiple others.²⁰ A catholic personality, however, cannot be cultivated in isolation—it requires “a catholic community,”²¹ a community able to perceive the Other as a potential source of enrichment, rather than a threat to the purity of self-conceptions. Such a community of embrace toward the Other is only possible, says Volf, because of a catholic identity, born of the Spirit, which creates distance from one’s own culture.

Volf highlights a second important function of this distance born of the Spirit, “it entails a judgment both against a monochrome character of one’s own culture and against evil in every culture.”²² This is an essential distinction for ecclesiology because a community seeking to indiscriminately incorporate all otherness into itself would become incapable of discernment. Such a community, says Volf, would be “grotesque.”²³ Instead, the church is called to have one foot planted in their own culture and the other in God’s future, so as to have the essential vantage point “from which to perceive and judge the self and the other *not simply on their own terms* but in the light of God’s new world.”²⁴

By the Spirit, Christians are not only baptized into the one body but also made into a new creation through participation in the eternal dance of the Triune life. By sharing in the life of this self-giving, unity-in-plurality God, the church is able, however imperfectly, to point to and express in a partial way God’s eschatological promise for the renewal of the whole of creation. In a world deeply wrought by enmity, bondage, despair, and destruction, the church is called to be a visible foretaste of God’s reconciling work, embodying resistance to the pernicious proclivity to retreat from the Other and the penchant to make space in our world *only*

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 51.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Miroslav Volf, “A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict”, *The Ecumenical Review* 47:2 (1995), 199.

²³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 52.

²⁴ Ibid. (emphasis mine).

for those with whom there is great affinity, for those who pose no genuine risk to our security.

Volf's metaphor of embrace offers a salient resource to enable Christian churches to be communities where an authentic posture of embrace toward the Other can be cultivated, a posture which permits the Other to persist genuinely in his or her otherness. Chapter three of this work reflected on the problematic tendency within post-Holocaust theology to grasp for commonalities in an effort to make others less Other to one another—a propensity which elucidates the need for churches to cultivate concrete practices of embrace where the Other is not reduced to our sameness. Chapter three also highlighted the tendency toward witness people thinking and the broader difficulties of trying to conceptually master the Other by dictating the role that he or she will play in the Christian narrative. Volf's drama of embrace offers a springboard toward potentially ameliorating these problematic propensities. Here, boundaries of identity are carefully cherished just as the alterity of the Other is respected and preserved.

Reflection on the embrace of the Other, as a movement rooted in the life of the Triune God, reveals that the practice of embrace is not an isolated endeavor but an inescapably communal affair—one that must be learned, taught, rehearsed, and treasured within Christian communities as a defining characteristic of ecclesial identity. While the dynamics of embrace will vary greatly depending on the specific ecclesial context where this practice takes place, a posture of embrace offers a helpful point of departure for contending against the tendency to assimilate, dominate, or reject the Other. The will to embrace the Other and cultivate identities which make space for the Other is the *sine qua non* for the other ecclesial practices, i.e., solidarity and hospitality which are discussed in the following.

II. SOLIDARITY AND THE BOUNDARIES OF MORAL OBLIGATION

In addition to a posture of embrace, a second related Christian practice which might better enable churches to resist the impulse to reject the Other is the practice of solidarity, envisioned here as greatly expanded boundaries of moral obligation which include the Other in response to the question of “who is my neighbor?” The universe

of moral obligation has been a significant thread throughout this work and is a helpful conceptual tool for delineating “What is my responsibility to the other who persists in his or her otherness?”²⁵ Rubenstein and Roth note that, “One of religions most important functions is to define a community’s universe of moral obligation, that is, that circle in which people honor reciprocal obligations to protect one another.”²⁶

A. The Practice of Solidarity

In its most basic sense, the practice of solidarity springs from the simple conviction that every human being has infinite worth as one equally formed in the image of God. Solidarity arises from a commitment to participate in the struggles of the human community, seeing the world, as Bonhoeffer says, “from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short from the perspective of those who suffer.”²⁷ Pawlikowski argues that in light of the Holocaust, churches must make human rights a central component of their ecclesiology:

The vision of the Church that must direct post-Holocaust Christian thinking is one in which the survival of all persons is integral to the authentic survival of the church itself. ‘Unfortunate expendables’ must disappear from authentic ecclesial self-definition.²⁸

²⁵ I am indebted to Marie Baird for the phrasing of this question. See *On the Side of the Angel: Ethics and Post-Holocaust Spirituality* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 26.

²⁶ Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 278. A similar notion to Fein’s universe of moral obligation comes from philosopher Peter Singer who describes how each of us discerns a “moral circle that embraces those considered worthy of our moral consideration.” Peter Singer *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), 16.

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 17. The theme of solidarity in suffering was key to Bonhoeffer’s theology. He said, “Costly grace provokes divine discontent. It transforms and reconciles and heals. It calls to discipleship and draws us into fellowship with God and with the vast and variegated host of those for whom God cares, especially the weak and the poor and the oppressed.” Quoted in Duncan Forrester’s *The True Church and Morality: Reflections on Ecclesiology and Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 13-14.

²⁸ Pawlikowski continues, “There is no way for Christianity, or any other religious tradition, to survive meaningfully if it allows the death or suffering of other people to become a by-product of its efforts for self-preservation.” “Catholic Views on the Holocaust and Genocide: A Critical Appraisal” in *Confronting Genocide*, Stephen L. Jacobs, ed., 274.

Thus, the practice of solidarity is more than just a generic commitment to the principle of human rights, rather it is an obligation to be a church *for* others, to stand in community with those who are isolated, victimized, persecuted, reviled, objectified, disenfranchised, stereotyped or otherwise treated unjustly by any institution, society or nation.²⁹

The practice of solidarity is profoundly rooted in the compassion and suffering of Jesus, whose life was characterized by entering into solidarity with those ostracized as “other.” Throughout Scripture, Jesus chooses to identify himself with those whom society considered enemies, unclean, or immoral. Rubenstein and Roth point to the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 as paradigmatic of the way Jesus radically redefines the boundaries of solidarity for those who claim to be his followers. In response to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus suggests that it is *need*, not race, ethnicity, social class, or beliefs that define the universe of obligation.³⁰ In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus explicitly augments the limited scope of moral solidarity to include enemies and persecutors within the sphere of care and responsibility. Rubenstein and Roth state, “Many others call themselves Christians, but that identification is inauthentic to the extent that they ignore the expanded boundaries of obligation suggested by Jesus. Of such narrowness apostasy is made.”³¹

Anselm Min speaks of Jesus as one who had “a preferential love for the marginalized others of his society: the powerless, sick, hungry, weeping, the impure, the lepers, the blind, lame and deaf—all of whom were victims of closed systems of identity.”³² He describes the incarnate Jesus as the “embodiment of human

²⁹ Hannah Arendt has pointed out in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “There is today no longer any credible intellectual basis for affirming the existence of human rights.... The only rights an individual has are those he possesses by virtue of his membership in a concrete community which has the power to guarantee him those rights.” Quoted in Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America*, 101.

³⁰ Richard Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 217.

³¹ Ibid. Monica Hellwig confirms this contention: “To be a follower of Jesus means in the first place to enter by compassion into his experience, with all that it expresses of the divine and of the human. And it means in the second place to enter with him into the suffering and the hope of all human persons, making common cause with them as he does, and seeking out as he does the places of his predilection among the poor and despised and oppressed.” Monika K. Hellwig, *Jesus: The Compassion of God* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 1983), 108.

³² Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (T&T Clark, 2004), 84.

solidarity.”³³ In the same way that Christ identified with and entered into human suffering, the church is called to mirror the incarnation, to be an eschatological community that transcends boundaries of otherness and alienation to enter into costly solidarity with the whole of God’s groaning creation. Volf notes how significant the notion of God’s self-donation in Christ is for the practice of entering into solidarity and suffering with those who are oppressed:

All *sufferers* can find comfort in the solidarity of the Crucified; but only those who struggle against evil by following the example of the Crucified will discover him at their side. To claim the comfort of the Crucified while rejecting his way is to advocate not only cheap grace but a deceitful ideology.³⁴

The recognition that the practice of solidarity is the calling of the church is, likewise, evinced in these WCC statements where solidarity is conceived as a “baptismal vocation.”

The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalized. This entails critically analyzing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation.³⁵

In the present, the solidarity of Christians with the joys and sorrows of their neighbors, and their engagement in the struggle for the dignity of all who suffer, for the excluded and the poor, belongs to their baptismal vocation. It is the way they are brought face to face with Christ in his identification with the victimized and outcast.³⁶

³³ Ibid. When reflecting on solidarity, Min notes that he prefers the phrase “solidarity of others” rather than “solidarity with others” because the latter implies a paternalistic sense of a “privileged vantage point from which I or we look at others as other and choose which others to enter into solidarity with” (82). Solidarity of others, in contrast, does not imply any kind of privileged center or normative perspective and recognizes that “all are others to one another, that we as others to one another are equally responsible, and that all are subjects, not objects.”

³⁴ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 24.

³⁵ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 40. The section continues, “The Church is called to proclaim the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, by its works of compassion and mercy (cf. Lk.4:18-19). This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God’s instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (cf. 2Cor. 5:18-21). It is also called, together with all people of goodwill, to care for the integrity of creation in addressing the abuse and destruction of God’s creation, and to participate in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity.”

³⁶ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, § 77. Likewise, “The World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” says, “Now is the time when the ecumenical movement needs a greater

B. Boundaries of Moral Obligation

Throughout this work, I have depicted how *little* solidarity the churches under the Third Reich had with Jews and others who were slated as outcasts and relegated beyond the bounds of ecclesial care and concern.³⁷ In chapter one, I explored the pervasiveness of us-them thinking and the detrimental repercussions for the churches when those who are not “us” are jettisoned from the realm of moral care and concern. The farther out an individual or group is from the center of the universe of moral obligation, the greater their invisibility and vulnerability. Likewise, chapter three explored the churches’ tepid response to non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, highlighting that not only Jews, but a wide array of others were essentially evicted from the churches’ universe of moral obligation during this dark time. Once cast outside these boundaries, ethical responsibilities were not envisioned as binding. I argued that the churches’ passivity toward those other unfortunate expendables under the Third Reich demands that boundaries of solidarity reconceived and reconstructed, in order to make space to stand in solidarity with those who are generally conceived as on the outside.

What does this process of stretching the boundaries of our obligation entail? A critical starting point was found in the previous chapter, which portrayed the import of traversing boundaries as a movement which reflects God’s own activity on behalf of sinful human beings. I described the significance of porous and flexible boundaries of identity, which are essential for the augmentation of boundaries of moral obligation and the cultivation of solidarity with those who are not typically envisioned as “one of us.” While the tendency to construe ethical solidarity as

sense of binding, mutual commitment and solidarity in word and action. It is the promise of God’s covenant for our time and our world to which we respond. Thus we affirm: that all exercise of power is accountable to God; God’s option for the poor; the equal value of all races and peoples; that male and female are created in the image of God; that truth is at the foundation of a community of free people; the peace of Jesus Christ; the creation as beloved of God; that the earth is the Lord’s; the dignity and commitment of the younger generation; that human rights are given by God.” *Now is The Time*, JPIC Final Document (Geneva, WCC, 1990), 12-20.

³⁷ Saul Friedländer points this out saying, “Not one social group, not one religious community, not one scholarly institution or professional association in Germany and throughout Europe declared its solidarity with the Jews (some of the Christian churches declared that converted Jews were part of the flock, up to a point); to the contrary, many social constituencies, many power groups were directly involved in the expropriation of the Jews and eager, be it out of greed, for their wholesale disappearance. Thus *Nazi and related anti-Jewish policies could unfold to their most extreme levels without the interference of any major countervailing interests.*” Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Perennial Press, 2007), xxi.

primarily restricted to one's own kin is perfectly natural, as this work has evinced, the ramifications for ecclesiology are catastrophic. When ethical responsibility is conceived in terms of applying *only* to those with whom there is deep commonality and reciprocity, churches can easily become myopic and powerless to see beyond the confines of their own narrow purview; they become incapable of entering into solidarity with those outside their tightly constricted universe—and often fail to even see the need to do so. David Gushee confirms how vital it is to broaden boundaries of moral responsibility, particularly in light of Christian behavior during the Holocaust. He says,

Too often the churches in the regions where the Holocaust occurred were expressions of an established Christianity that included everyone in the realm (except those stubbornly committed, as minorities, to other cohesive faiths, like the Jews, or to secularist ideologies).³⁸

As the narrative of the churches under the Third Reich exemplifies, a church that is turned in on itself, fostering carefully conscripted boundaries of ethical concern, cannot simply manufacture solidarity ad hoc. When the Nazis began to unleash the full fury of genocidal measures against Jews and other undesirables, the churches were found lacking any semblance of solidarity with those destined for annihilation. Douglas Huneke asserts, “Solidarity with victims must begin long before there are public actions leading to victimization. Solidarity with victims is a timeless, evolutionary, expansive, and consistent lifestyle.”³⁹

The costly nature of solidarity cannot be underestimated. This practice is one that must be deeply nourished, inculcated, and rehearsed in the life of the ecclesial community who wishes that no person might ever be invisible or jettisoned outside the bounds of their care and concern. This will require a re-conception of ecclesial identity in order to center an ethical responsibility for the Other at the very core, seeing the persecution or victimization of even one person as a threat to the life of

³⁸ David Gushee, “The Good News after Auschwitz: A Biblical Reflection,” in *“Good News After Auschwitz?”* 165.

³⁹ Douglas Huneke, *The Stones Will Cry Out: Pastoral Reflections on the Shoah* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 87. He continues, “Without an intentional, constant, emphatic, egalitarian ethic, there can be all manner of confessional verbiage, but there will also be tremendous behavioral contradictions between the lofty words and the essential concrete actions that must follow.”

community itself. On a practical level, the challenge for each ecclesial community will be first, to discern who is typically envisioned as outside the scope of our moral obligation and then, to strive as a body to radically re-envision the scope of the universe of moral obligation, asking what concrete practices might enable us to stand in solidarity with those who have been formerly banished to the outside?

III. THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

In this work, I have described how Jews and other unfortunate expendables were slated as anathematized others in Nazi Germany, radically *unwelcome* to share living space in the universe of the Third Reich. After the Holocaust, and in light of the increasingly pluralistic world in which we live, a world where “others” are increasingly pushed to the margins, the Christian practice of hospitality becomes increasingly imperative. This section will explore the dynamics of hospitality, as well as the notion that the identity and mission of the church are rooted in welcoming and caring for those on the margins. Arthur Sutherland summarizes this position aptly saying, “Hospitality is the practice by which the church stands or falls.”⁴⁰

A. The Dynamics of Hospitality

Henri Nouwen describes the essential theological qualities that make up the practice of hospitality and how desperately this practice is required:

In a world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture, and country, from their neighbors, friends, and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear... That is our vocation, to convert the *hostis* into a *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully expressed.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 83. Andre Jacques perceptively observes, “Whether we like it or not, the stranger within our gates reflect our societies like mirrors; our treatment of refugees and migrants reveal our values; our collective or individual behavior towards them shows where we stand as far as the fine principles of equality, justice and respect for human rights are concerned.” *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Uprooted People In The World Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 67.

⁴¹ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 46-47.

Christine Pohl offers a simple and practical definition of hospitality as “extending to strangers a quality of kindness usually reserved for friends and family.”⁴² She argues that hospitality is pivotal to the meaning of the gospel, which is “the lens through which we can read and understand much of the gospel, and a practice by which we can welcome Jesus himself.”⁴³ While throughout most of Christian history, practicing hospitality was seen as fundamental to ecclesial identity and practice,⁴⁴ Pohl laments that the term “hospitality” has largely lost its moral dimensions and that most Christians have lost touch with the rich and complex tradition of hospitality. She says, “Today most understandings of hospitality have a minimal moral component—hospitality is a nice extra if we have the time or the resources, but we rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity.”⁴⁵ However, even a cursory review of the first seventeen centuries of church history demonstrates how critical the practice of hospitality was to the proliferation and credibility of the Gospel, to enabling the church to transcend national and ethnic differences and to care of the sick, poor, widow, orphan, or stranger in the name of Christ.⁴⁶

The motivation for hospitality has deep roots in the biblical tradition, extending back at least as far as the injunction in Leviticus 19:33-34 to welcome strangers and to treat them justly. The command to welcome the stranger occurs in the Torah no less than 36 times, more than any other commandment.⁴⁷ For the people of ancient Israel who had themselves have been vulnerable strangers and aliens in the land of Egypt, the expectation was that they would care for vulnerable, ostracized strangers in their midst.⁴⁸

The experience of being on the margins was normative for the ancient Israelites, as well as for the early Christians who also understood themselves as being strangers, exiles, and aliens in this world. Amos Yong argues that from a theological

⁴² Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 19.

⁴³ Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 8.

⁴⁴ For an excellent account of the heritage of Christian hospitality see *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* by Christine Pohl (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

⁴⁵ Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 4.

⁴⁶ Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 6-7.

⁴⁷ Darrell Fasching, *The Coming of the Millennium*, 30.

⁴⁸ Another motivation for hospitality arises from the biblical notion that God is often to be found incognito among strangers and reveals himself as a stranger (e.g. Gen. 18).

perspective “The Christian condition of being aliens and strangers in this world means both that we are perpetually guests, first of God and then of others, and that we should adopt the postures appropriate to receiving hospitality even when we find ourselves as hosts.”⁴⁹

The imperative for hospitality arises not only from the memory of being a stranger oneself, but emerges most saliently from the person and work of Jesus Christ who embodied a posture of hospitality *par excellence*. Volf says, “Beliefs about who Christ is and what Christ did, expressed in the form of narratives, ritual actions, or propositions, provide the norm for the Christian practice of hospitality.”⁵⁰ The parable of the Good Samaritan exemplifies Jesus’ command to welcome and safeguard the vulnerable stranger, even the despised cultural and religious enemy. Jesus admonished, “Go and do likewise.”⁵¹ Thomas Reynolds remarks, “Such love marks an economy of grace within which there is no outcast. Jesus’s family is all humanity. Boundaries are leveled. No one is exempt from God’s love, left on the

⁴⁹ Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 124-125. Amos Yong has developed the notion of a Stranger-centered theology, beginning with the theological posture of being strangers and aliens in this world and modeled after Jesus, who became a stranger, coming into a far country, even to the point of his death. Yong envisions Christian mission as the embodiment of a divine hospitality that loves strangers, even to the point of giving up one’s own life on behalf of others, in order so that they might be reconciled with one another, and ultimately they might in turn be reconciled to God (131). Yong’s work also identifies three communal forms of this stranger-centered theology of hospitality committed to welcoming, including and reconciling strangers. Such a posture manifests itself in the concrete ecclesial practices of a visible and welcoming face, a dialogical posture, and a commitment to public servanthood (134). See pgs. 134-139 for more on these practices.

A similar concept is found in Darrell Fasching’s *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz*. Fasching suggests that the key to overcoming the problem of spiritual self-preoccupation, so evident during the Holocaust era, lies in becoming a stranger to oneself. This allows for a “decentered or alienated theology” which enables one to center the true stranger at the core of their theological and ethic concern. The result of this alienated theological stance is that the church could welcome strangers in all their strangeness, rather than seeing them simply as potential converts to sameness. Fasching writes that theologies that “can tolerate the alien or other, if at all, only as a potential candidate for conversion to sameness,” are theologies that inevitably and ultimately lead to the demise of the Other,” *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).⁴

⁵⁰ Volf and Bass eds., *Practicing Theology*, 250. Likewise, Arthur Sutherland says, “In light of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and return, Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, either in public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocation. *I Was A Stranger*, xiii.

⁵¹ Luke 10:25-27, NRSV. This parable highlights that Christian hospitality is not only directed to fellow believers nor only to strangers. Amos Yong points out that the injunction to extend hospitality to strangers in Romans 12:13 takes place within broader context of injunction to bless one’s persecutors and do good to one’s enemies (see Romans 12:14-21). *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 115.

outside.”⁵² In a similar manner, Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25 points to the importance of being open to the stranger, “I was a stranger and you invited me in.” Here, Jesus identifies himself as having been visited while imprisoned, clothed when naked, fed and given drink when hungry and thirsty, and welcomed in whilst a stranger. The parable summons the followers of Christ to be welcoming to “the least of these” as unto Christ himself.⁵³

The genesis of hospitality lies in the recognition of the stranger⁵⁴ and the willingness to welcome him or her into one’s own space as a person formed in the image of God. Jonathan Sacks says, “The religious challenge is to find God’s image in someone who is not in our image, in someone whose colour is different, whose culture is different, who speaks a different language, tells a different story, and worships God in a different way.”⁵⁵ The Christian practice of hospitality challenges the concept of a self-enclosed identity, an identity centered on insulating oneself from that which is different or frightening. When we embody a commitment to hospitality, we insist on letting the stranger into our most intimate and treasured circle and resist the pervasive impulse to close the circle in self-preservation. Hospitality is thus a posture of radical reciprocity that creates within oneself space for identifying with and receiving the stranger as one of equal value, as one who may shape us and change us out of the richness of their unique experiences.⁵⁶ Thus, for genuine hospitality to take place, hosts must not dictate how guests must change but

⁵² Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids: Bravos Press, 2008), 222.

⁵³ Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV).

⁵⁴ Who is a stranger? A stranger can signify a host of people—the poor, orphan, widow, homeless, disenfranchised, the person of different background, color, belief, education, sexual orientation, or physical appearance. In the most basic sense, they are the Other, from whom we would like to remain at a safe distance. The most vulnerable strangers are disconnected from family, community, church, work, and society; they are detached from basic relationships that give someone a secure place in the world.

⁵⁵ J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid a Clash of Civilizations*: (London: Continuum, 2004) quoted in Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 264.

⁵⁶ Henry Knight also speaks about the potential of being changed by welcoming the stranger saying, “The inward movement of hospitality leads to the enlargement of one’s inner resources. As otherness is taken in, embraced, and integrated into one’s heart and soul, we grow in our capacities to meet and regard others with respect and care. That is, genuine outward expressions of hospitality to others are tied to an inner hospitality of soul. True intercession for the world requires making room in one’s inner life for the other—and for God as the Other—in a progressive and steadfast manner.” Henry Knight, “The Holy Ground of Hospitality: Good News for a Shoah-Tempered World”, in Rittner and Roth, *“Good News” after Auschwitz*, 105.

rather provide a safe, welcoming space that allows people of other faiths, cultures, and even enemies to be welcomed in and transformed into friends.

Like the concomitant practice of embrace, hospitality is also an extremely messy endeavor, fraught with vicissitudes of inviting the stranger in—and wishing (or begging) the stranger to leave when we have had all that we can bear. Strangers are not always gracious guests but are often demanding and difficult to love—those we fear will drain the very life out of us. Here again we see the importance of hospitality being practiced within the life of the Christian community and not simply as an individual undertaking.

As the previous chapter explored, welcoming the Other into our sacred space is not a simplistic relativism where boundaries of identity no longer matter, nor is it an indiscriminate romanticized openness to all otherness with no measure of discernment or judgment involved. Instead, true hospitality allows boundaries to stay in place, but graciously makes space for genuine welcome within them. To offer welcome in a world riddled with fear, injustice, and human brokenness will require spiritual and moral intuition, prayer, and a continual dependence on the Spirit for grace and wisdom. It will also require a careful, pragmatic consideration of the congregation's unique context in order to assess who is on the margins, who is vulnerable and in need of being welcomed in.

While churches have great potential for nurturing hospitality, the practice is much more nuanced than simply cultivating a hospitable environment in which to welcome people in. Not all strangers will want to be welcomed into the church, and thus a critical element of the practice of hospitality is the reciprocal nature of both inviting others to come in, as well as being willing to go out, to traverse boundaries. In offering hospitality as host, we must also be able to receive it in return as guests, lest hospitality become an effort in hierarchical power-holding. Anthony Gittins offers this insight,

Unless the person who sometimes *extends* hospitality is also able sometimes to be a gracious recipient, and unless the one who receives *the other* as stranger is also able to *become* the stranger by another, then, far from

“relationships,” we are merely creating unidirectional lines of power flow, however unintended this may be.⁵⁷

In a world saturated with a rejection of otherness, hospitality must not be constricted to mean simply an invitation to enter into *our* space on *our* terms, but instead the invitation is offered to the stranger, the Other, to enter our homes, our domains, our lives, and to share their unique story and presence with us, in hopes that we might also be able to take part in their world, and that our own perspective might be expanded and enriched through the experience of their presence.

While it is easy to partake in abstract theological reflections on hospitality and welcoming the Other, it is vital that these discussions actually translate into making concrete space in our lives, homes, families and churches for the stranger—the one on the margins with ostensibly little to offer. As Pohls reminds us,

Hospitable attitudes, even a principled commitment to hospitality, do not challenge us or transform our loyalties in the way that actual hospitality to particular strangers does. Hospitality in the abstract lacks the mundane, troublesome, yet rich dimensions of a profound human practice.⁵⁸

Thus the challenge for congregations is to translate abstract commitments to loving and welcoming the stranger and enemy into personal and concrete expression of hospitality toward the marginalized, the strangers, and the enemy in their midst.⁵⁹ We will briefly explore what the concrete practice of hospitality might look like when embodied in the local churches the grassroots level as radical welcome.

⁵⁷ Anthony J. Gittins, “Beyond Hospitality? The Missionary Status and Role Revisited,” *International Review of Mission* 83/33 (July 1994), 399. Thomas Ogletree echoes a similar concern, “My readiness to welcome the other into my world must be balanced by my readiness to enter the world of the other...The universal claims which are implicit in my perspective are offset by the universal claims residing in the perspective of the stranger. In short, the ramifications of hospitality are not fully manifest unless I also know the meaning of being a stranger.” Thomas Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 4.

⁵⁸ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 14.

⁵⁹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 75.

B. Radical Welcome

In *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*, Stephanie Spellers outlines some of the dynamics of hospitality and welcome which are taking place in the context of eight churches in the United States. Her work offers some helpful insights into how churches might begin to cultivate the practice of hospitality at the local level as a vital part of their identity and praxis. The practice of radical welcome is guided by the contention, “If anyone is wondering what the reign of God looks like, they should be able to look at the mission of the church and catch a glimpse.”⁶⁰ Spellers describes radical welcome as “the spiritual practice of embracing and being changed by the gifts, presence, voices, and power of The Other: the people systematically cast out of or marginalized within a church, a denomination and/or society.”⁶¹ Radical welcome combines the spiritual practice of welcome and hospitality with a profound awareness of the pernicious powers and structures of exclusion.

While the unique demographics of each church must be carefully considered, Spellers points out that every congregation has people on the margins, “a disempowered Other who is in your midst or just outside your door.”⁶² Radically welcoming communities can go forth and ask the difficult question: “Who is not at the table?” and invite them to come in.⁶³ An essential stage on the way to becoming a radically welcome congregation is thus cultivating a critical consciousness of who is inside, who is marginalized and left on the outside, and why.⁶⁴ Radical welcome is envisioned as a commitment to transforming and opening the hearts of congregations so that the Other might find the ecclesial community to be a warm, embracing place and the congregation might finally be liberated to embrace and be transformed by an authentic encounter with those on the margins.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 77.

⁶¹ Spellers book was written as a practical theological guide for congregations wishing to become a place where welcoming the Other is taken serious. Speller offers a sketch of eight unique Episcopal congregations throughout the United States in urban, suburban, and rural congregations. Her book is founded on two years of parish work and over 200 interviews with those tackling the challenge of trying to live out the notion of radical welcome. For more, see *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 6.

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 72.

⁶⁴ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 76.

⁶⁵ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 6.

Spellers distinguishes between three dominant approaches that Christian congregations have when it comes to inviting others to be part of their community: inviting, inclusion, and radical welcome. She perceptively describes the underlying message, goal, effort, and result of these three approaches. The message of an inviting congregation is “Come, join our community and share our cultural values and heritage.” The goal here is assimilation. The community invites others in, to adopt the dominant group’s identity and essentially become one of them. A variety of systems and programs are put in place to draw in newcomers and incorporate them into existing structures of identity. The results may be an influx of members in the institution, says Spellers, but the congregation’s demographics are “overwhelmingly monocultural.”⁶⁶

The second approach, inclusion, sends the message to those on the outside to come and “help us be diverse.” Here, the goal is incorporation of marginalized groups; they are welcomed in, but allowed no space to make an authentic shift in the church’s cultural identity and practices. This approach usually entails an implied commitment to inclusivity, but the result is a “revolving door,” whereby people coming from the margins either remain at the edges, or end up leaving altogether. Spellers says that with this approach the institutional structure persists in its monoculturalism, only allowing room for “some pockets of difference.”⁶⁷

Finally and in contrast, a posture of radical welcome sends the message, “Bring your culture, your voice, your whole self—we want to engage in truly mutual relationship.” The goal of this approach is neither assimilation nor incorporation but incarnation. The ecclesial community “embodies and expresses the full range of voices and gifts present, including the Other.” This is accomplished through programs and efforts to welcome people in, especially those on the margins, to make sure that their gifts, presence and perspectives are visible and valued and to ensure that they influence the congregation’s identity, ministries, and structures. Spellers says the result of radical embrace is a “transformed and transforming community with open doors and open hearts; different groups share power and shape identity, mission, leadership, worship and ministries.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 64.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The practice of radical welcome depicted here is not simply an invitation to join the church and assimilate but instead portrays congregations who are deeply committed to welcoming the Other, without demanding they relinquish any part their unique identities, beliefs, or histories. It offers a glimpse into what making space for the Other might look like in a local congregation. Spellers says, “The more we welcome new perspectives and voices into our lives, the bigger and fuller our knowledge of the world and of God, and the richer our identity as the body of Christ.”⁶⁹

C. A Portrait of Hospitality

This final section will offer one more vista of the practice of hospitality through a portrait of a community of Christian rescuers during the Holocaust, in hopes of depicting both the unique quality of hospitality they embodied, as well as the practice of solidarity with those who are victimized and suffering. “Whatever else we may say about the period of history we call the Shoah,” says Henry Knight, “it was a time of radical inhospitality.”⁷⁰ Knight argues that an important key for rethinking Christian practice after Auschwitz is “radical hospitality,” which becomes the “countertestimony to the radical inhospitality of the Shoah.”⁷¹

The community which saliently embodied such radical hospitality was the Huguenot village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon who, spearheaded by Pastor Andre Trocme and his French Protestant congregation, communally rescued thousands of Jews from the Nazi maw of death. The rescue endeavors of this sterling community have been so frequently rehearsed in Holocaust scholarship that I hesitate to include the story here, lest it become more quotidian. However, the familiarity and fascination with the Le Chambon story can largely be attributed to the fact that, during the Holocaust, such examples of a whole community becoming agents of corporate rescue were such an anomaly.⁷² The dearth of stories such as this one

⁶⁹ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 81.

⁷⁰ Henry F. Knight, “The Holy Ground of Hospitality: Good News for a Shoah-Tempered World,” in Rittner and Roth, *“Good News” after Auschwitz*, 99.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Douglas Huneke described the significance of “communal rescues” which he defined as rescues carried out by groups of people residing in close proximity to each other and sharing “common, long-established values, functioning as a cohesive group prior to the war” and establishing an international rescue plan and network. Huneke’s work highlights the great capacity of these kinds of groups to

testify to how desperately the practice of hospitality was needed and what a small candle the community of Le Chambon was amidst an expanse of utter darkness. In radically inhospitable times, the tiny village of Le Chambon offered succor for an estimated 3,000-5,000 Jewish adults and children, proving a quiet, consistent kind of hospitality which made Le Chambon one of the only safe havens for Jews throughout occupied Europe. John K. Roth says, “The people of Le Chambon made their village an ark of hope in a sea of flame and ash.”⁷³

This tiny community depicts a stark contrast to the abundance of testimonies from the Holocaust era which expose that churches and Christian communities were habitually unwilling to offer provision, and often even acted as an impediment to rescue efforts.⁷⁴ In Le Chambon, the local church and its pastor were at the forefront in propelling their community from apathy to salvific resistance. Their efforts of radical hospitality demonstrated that they valued the stranger as a fellow human being, one made in the image of God, for whom they were willing to risk their own lives.⁷⁵ One of the most striking things churches can learn from this example is how *natural* it was for this community to behave in this way. Unlike the long, drawn out debates taking place in the ranks of the Confessing Church and elsewhere regarding the doctrinal, political, and practical implications of providing rescue or protest on behalf of beleaguered victims, here we see that opening the door to those who were vulnerable was a natural, almost reflexive response.

rescue, on a scale which is impossible for individuals or a small collective of people. Huneke “Glimpses of Light in a Vast Darkness: A Study of the Moral and Spiritual Development of Nazi Era Rescuers,” in *Remembering for the Future*, A. Roy Eckardt and Alice Eckardt eds. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 488.

⁷³ Roth “Good News after Auschwitz: Does Christianity Have Any?” in Rittner and Roth, “*Good News*” after Auschwitz, 183.

⁷⁴ Illustrative of rescuers operating with little to no ecclesial support, Huneke interviews a number of Christian rescuers of Jews and notes that nearly half of them described themselves as “post-institutional Christians” who could not bring themselves to attend church (or attended only faintheartedly) because during the Nazi era they did not receive any provision or encouragement from the church in their rescue efforts. He cites two examples: a Polish woman who would no longer return to church after her priest refused to provide her with baptismal certificates for the children she was trying to rescue, and a German rescuer who disdained his own Lutheran tradition after his pastor denied his request for assistance in hiding Jews. Huneke writes that a number of rescuers did not look to the churches for help because, as one rescuer said, “I did not even think of the church as a place to look for support of my efforts” (In *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah: In the Presence of Burning Children*, 104-105).

⁷⁵ In his study on rescuers of Jews, David Gushee says, “Rescuers were those whose actions revealed the conviction that it was morally obligatory to invite the stranger within the reach of human care, even though doing so might cost the rescuer everything.” Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, 113.

This is evidenced in interviews with the Chambonnais themselves. When philosopher Phillip Halle journeyed to Le Chambon in a quest to discover “how goodness had happened there” in a world so saturated with evil, Pastor Trocme responded to his queries saying,

How can you call us “good”? We were doing what had to be done. Who else could help them? And what has all this to do with goodness? Things had to be done, that’s all, and we happened to be there to do them. You must understand that it was *the most natural thing in the world* to help these people.⁷⁶

Likewise, his wife Magda Trocme responded to any needy stranger who knocked on her door by saying, “Naturally, come in, and come in,”⁷⁷ reflecting a deeply habitual response which Eva Fogelman describes as “reflexive.”⁷⁸

This kind of reflexivity, where the most instinctive reaction is to offer succor to the vulnerable Other, is not something that emerges ad hoc, but rather is inculcated deeply within the daily rhythms and practices of the Christian community.⁷⁹ Barnett

⁷⁶ Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 20-21 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁷ Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, 120. Philip Hallie concluded that “the opposite of cruelty is not simply freedom from the cruel relationship, it is hospitality.” Philip Hallie, “From Cruelty to Goodness,” *The Hastings Center Report* 11 (1981). 26-27.

⁷⁸ See Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 4. Eva Fogelmann’s research contends that while morality was the main motivation functioning for rescuers, “emotional-moral” responses were predicated upon “caring and responsibility.” *Conscience and Courage*, 164. She states, “The actions of rescuers were consistent with their moral beliefs, identities, feelings, and attitudes.” *Conscience and Courage*, 80.

It is interesting to note that hospitality was often a significant part of rescuers background growing up. The research of Samuel and Pearl Oliner unearthed that rescuers practiced radical hospitality to the Other in an “extensive” manner, extending out of the inclusive nature of their upbringing. They habitually welcomed strangers into their homes as neighbors and extended hospitality to them, simply because they were in need of sanctuary. They identify especially “values of caring” as the “key to altruism.” Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, 163. Oliner and Oliner describe caring as “benevolence and kindness,” saying it “can only be given by a human face.” Caring “focuses on the interests of others” and “goes beyond what can reasonably and fairly be expected of humans in society.” Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, 164. The authors say that caring entailed “assuming personal responsibility” and that “most rescuers reported rarely reflecting before acting.” When asked how long they deliberated before making their initial decision to rescue, more than 70 percent indicated “minutes.” *The Altruistic Personality*, 168-169 Thus, Oliner and Oliner ascertain that rescuer’s sense of moral obligation was significantly stronger than that of non-rescuers. Their emphatic responses were prompted by the experiences of others “pain,” “sadness,” or “helplessness.” Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, 174.

⁷⁹ Through small in number, the rescue efforts of Quakers also stress this instinctive notion of helping Jews. See Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), especially chapter 6.

says, “What the people of Le Chambon did was create an ethical community that mirrored their ‘inward government’—i.e., that reflected their character. The creation of an ethical community is what saves people; its absence is what dooms them.”⁸⁰

Studies such as Le Chambon show the incredible potential of Christian communities, united in solidarity, to foster righteous actions on behalf of the oppressed and persecuted even amidst the most inimical of circumstances. This small remnant, who refused to allow their Jewish neighbors to be expelled from the universe of moral obligation but chose instead to welcome them in hospitality and embrace, offers both an indictment and a semblance of hope for the post-Holocaust church. The indictment springs from the fact that Le Chambon demonstrated there were indeed possibilities, however risky, to practice radical hospitality during that ominous era. And yet *so few did*. Jewish researcher Pierre Sauvage asks, considering that the Holocaust took place at the epicenter of European Christianity and in light of Christian complicity therein,

Are we...to view these Christians of Le Chambon and other caring Christians of that time as rare but legitimately representative embodiments of exemplary Christian faith or merely as marginal, possibly accidental successes of a disastrously ineffective one? To summarize, just how *Christian* were they?⁸¹

The frequency with which the story of Le Chambon is retold is a dolorous testimony to just how *untypical* their actions were.

Yet, because such radical hospitality took place at Le Chambon there is also a promise of hope—that the practice of hospitality can be implemented in our churches today, regardless of how inhospitable the context. Knight confirms this, “The good news...is that even in a post-Holocaust world, hospitality is possible, for at times hospitality happened during the Holocaust. It happened even there. Even then.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Barnett, *Bystanders*, 161-162. Barnett continues, saying ultimately, “ethical community” can be created only by individuals who see the purpose of their lives as connected to more than the private realm of their own lives.” Barnett, *Bystanders*, 162.

⁸¹ Pierre Sauvage, *Ten Questions About Righteous Conduct In Le Chambon And Elsewhere During The Holocaust*, address at “Faith in Humankind: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust,” U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council Conference, Washington, DC, Sept 19, 1984.

⁸² Henry F. Knight, “The Holy Ground of Hospitality: Good News for a Shoah-Tempered World”, in Rittner and Roth, *“Good News” after Auschwitz*, 111. Knight continues, “Even in the aftermath of the

The character, values, and practices which enabled the village of Le Chambon to welcome the vulnerable Other did not come about ex nihilo, but rather, as Huneke says they “were learned, grounded, rehearsed, and affirmed in ways that ensured their continued refining and practice.”⁸³ In the same way, the human propensity to recoil from the stranger can be become even deeper entrenched, being taught, learned and inculcated through repetition in a community. After studying the radical hospitality at Le Chambon, Philip Hallie makes the keen observation that “You must *be* what you are trying to teach.”⁸⁴ He warns,

If all we do for our children is pound into their heads reasons for protecting their own hides, their second nature will be as wide as the confines of their own...skins. One’s life is usually about as wide as one’s love. But if we make the often-impractical great virtues [e.g., compassion, generosity] part of their lives, their second nature will be as wide as their love.⁸⁵

If fear of the Other becomes the norm within a community, rather than the practice of hospitality, the result says Jean Vanier, is spiritual death. He writes,

Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share...a community which refuses to welcome—whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors—is dying spiritually.⁸⁶

In a world that is largely animated by fragmentation, disconnectedness, and competitiveness, the challenge is to instill and rehearse the practice of hospitality

Shoah, hospitality bears the promise of healing to a world torn asunder by our inhospitality to others. In this way, hospitality bears the redemptive promise of a renewed creation, one set back on course through a divine commitment to the abundant unfolding of life in the richness of otherness. [end quote?]

⁸³ Douglas K. Huneke. “In the Presence of Burning Children” in *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah*, Steven L. Jacobs (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 105.

⁸⁴ Philip Hallie, *Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1997), 43.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁶ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 266-267. Thomas Reynolds likewise says, “God is present in the mutual relation of receiving and giving, present in a way that yields wholeness and makes possible further acts of hospitality. Christians find divine welcome in welcoming others. This is why exclusion is devastating for the church. It prevents it from fulfilling its mission: to embody God’s hospitality toward humanity, which is shown in Christ.” Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids: Bravos Press, 2008), 245.

toward the stranger and other “undesirables” in our own context and community—until hospitality becomes a natural and indispensable part of ecclesial identity and praxis, such as we see embodied in Le Chambon.

IV. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this final chapter, I have sketched three interconnected Christian practices it is hoped will offer a concrete starting point to enable Christian communities to make space for otherness and to cultivate an authentic relationship with the Other qua Other. The three practices described here, embrace, solidarity and hospitality, have scantily begun to tap into the wealth of resources within Christian theology which might instill inclusivity and embrace toward the Other as cherished aspects of ecclesial identity and practice. The critical task remains for local churches to discern within their unique *Sitz im Leben*: who is the Other in our community? Why are they on the margins? What ideology, attitudes, and practices within ourselves and our church have exacerbated their marginalization? And what practical steps might we take to begin making space for the Other and for otherness in our own lives and communities?

CONCLUSION CHAPTER

I have aimed to describe some practical implications for ecclesiology which come to light when the landscape of post-Holocaust theology is examined through the lens of a rejection of otherness. Two underlying threads have guided the work: (1) that the pervasive penchant to reject the Other is one the most critical issues facing the churches today and, (2) that the Holocaust vividly portrays the devastating implications of a rejection of otherness for ecclesiology, revealing how vital it is that churches take seriously the challenge of otherness.

In order to weave these threads throughout the entire work, I constructed a hermeneutical lens that brought together significant psychological, sociological, cultural, and theological dynamics of otherness. The lens was composed of these critical components: the propensity to reject the Other as a cultural substrata rooted in the very core of human existence; the manifold forms that a rejection of otherness can take—both lethal and ostensibly benign; the structures of exclusion as deeply embedded within Christian theology; and the susceptibility of Christian institutions to the perils of otherization. To elucidate how imperative these issues are for contemporary ecclesiology, I exposed how a rejection of the Other vitiates the prophetic, moral witness of the church in a number of ways, most specifically through portraying the narrative of the purge of otherness within Nazi Germany.

This conceptual lens was used to examine the landscape of post-Holocaust theology in order to discern if any new dynamics might come to light, specifically regarding (1) how Christians understand their own behavior under Nazism and (2) how Christians and churches undertake the process of reforming their theology and practice in light of these assumptions.

I surveyed a wide range of ecclesial statements and the work of Holocaust theologians from throughout Europe and North America in order to ascertain patterns of ecclesial self-conceptions, particularly regarding the churches' understanding of their failure to respond ethically on behalf of victims of the Nazi regime. While the complex narrative of the churches' role in the Third Reich cannot be isolated to any one single factor, I concluded that the dominant answer given was that an acute antisemitism served to narcotize the collective Christian conscience and militated

against a strong moral protest on behalf of beleaguered victims. Because the vast majority of documents surveyed envision antisemitism as the *primary* cause for the churches' passive response, antisemitism is pinpointed as a malady that must be swiftly and thoroughly remedied if Christian credibility is to be restored in the post-Holocaust era.

I argued that the lens of otherness sheds new light on this prominent diagnosis within Christian post-Holocaust theology and prompts us to consider whether something even more enduring than antisemitism should play a substantive role in Christian reflections on the question of "what went wrong?" While deeply cognizant of the significance of traditional *adversus Judaeos* theology in fostering antipathy toward Jews, viewing the narrative of the churches under Hitler through the lens of otherness reveals some previously unexplored dynamics about what influenced the churches' behavior. The lens exposes that a consistent discernable pattern throughout the historical narrative of the Holocaust was a rejection of otherness—not simply the Jewish Other—but virtually all others existed outside the churches' boundaries of moral obligation. To support this contention, I explored the churches' passive response to non-Jewish victims, which shows how little solidarity or moral responsibility was exhibited in the face of the destruction of Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Gypsies, and a host of unfortunate others. The churches' veritable silence toward non-Jewish victims offers compelling evidence that a rejection of otherness was a considerable dynamic at play in the narrative of the churches under the Third Reich and one that merits significantly more scholarly attention within post-Holocaust reflections.

The dominant focus on antisemitism has largely eclipsed an earnest theological reflection on why non-Jewish victims were reckoned as "unfortunate expendables" and existed outside the churches' sphere of care and concern. Furthermore, it is clear in these statements that the destruction of the Jewish people is seen as imperiling the very survival of Christianity and the church itself. Post-Holocaust statements center on the acute crisis of identity that the Christian faith now faces on account of its complicity in the destruction of the Jewish people. And yet what of these other victims? Should not Christian passivity and complicity in the face of their annihilation also be of incredible import for ecclesiology? The fact that

so little critical attention is devoted to the destruction of such non-Jewish victims is a particularly problematic lacuna in the arena of Christian post-Holocaust theology. The constructive task remains for churches and theologians to grapple with the implications of the churches' silence towards these other groups for Christian self-conceptions and practice.

To summarize my argument thus far, the dominant focus within post-Holocaust theology to eradicating antisemitism, while an extremely laudable and critical task, has largely eclipsed the need for an honest confrontation with the churches' firmly implanted repugnance toward a host of incarnations of otherness. Such a confrontation would betray how deeply the structures of exclusion are embedded within the Christian psyche and within ecclesial practices.

Not only is the diagnosis of antisemitism myopic toward otherness, but I argued that tendencies in the proposed cure for the malady of antisemitism also reveal averse tendencies toward otherness in a number of problematic and subtle ways. Two patterns in particular were brought to light.

First, the accentuation on the special solidarity and common heritage that Christians share with the Jewish people is envisioned as a means to deracinate the roots of antisemitism/ anti-Judaism from Christian theology and offers the promise of a solid foundation for an improved Jewish-Christian relationship in the post-Holocaust age. The vast majority of documents surveyed emphasized the need for Christians and Jews to resuscitate their shared spiritual roots, which were largely forgotten or denied throughout centuries of church history. I argued that this stress on shared commonalities is radically inimical to an acceptance of otherness and is purchased at the cost of serious compromises to the self-understandings of both faiths.

Practically, if churches are able to undertake concrete steps toward cultivating mutual respect, solidarity, and even an embrace toward the Other, these advances must be rooted in something much deeper and more enduring than an insipid notion that *we're really all the same underneath*. Such a stance seeks to essentially transform the Other into a familiar commodity and denies the beauty and value of variation and difference. The tendency within post-Holocaust theology to domesticate the Other by trying to find a kernel of similarity underneath all the

differences betrays the belief, whether implicitly or explicitly, that otherness cannot co-exist except on the basis of commonalities—a premise which is profoundly problematic for the churches’ relationship with the Other. I suggested that the curative for a rejection of otherness is not found in rallying around real or purported similarities but rather resides in learning to embrace and value the Other in all his or her terrifying strangeness.

The quest for Jewish-Christian solidarity on the basis of a shared, spiritual heritage is an extremely problematic foundation upon which to construct any post-Holocaust conceptions of ecclesiology—because it fosters strategies of homogenization as a pathway to interfaith unity and inevitably leaves those who are radically Other on the margins. A more promising basis for churches in the post-Holocaust era would be built upon the practice of solidarity and the vocation of the church to protect the integrity and sacredness of every living human being.¹ Such a commitment would envisage boundaries of moral obligation in a way that the persecution or destruction of even one Other—regardless of that other’s religion or creed—would be seen as posing a critical problem for the identity and integrity of the whole church.

A second problematic pattern brought to light here is the pervasiveness of the witness people myth, which functions as the dominant conceptual lens through which Jews and Judaism are envisioned. Witness people thinking renders Christian identity dependent on certain static conceptions of Jews and Judaism—conceptions that Jews themselves may not agree with. Not only do such tendencies toward mythic Othering betray a deep contempt towards Jews and Judaism in all their multiplicity, but this pattern also evinces a disdain toward otherness *per se*, in that the Other is seen as a mere cipher, a gap into which numerous prejudices and misconceptions can be poured.

I argued that dictating the prescribed role any living Other will play in our own narrated identity is at the heart of the problem of a rejection of otherness—and is a tendency which post-Holocaust churches should be particularly cognizant of moving forward. This tendency reveals a profound discomfort with allowing others

¹ It should be noted that this practice of solidarity also has tremendous potential to be extended to a commitment to recognize the sacredness and worth of the non-human Other—a concept which demands much more critical attention than can be allotted here.

to articulate their own identities and recognizing the authenticity and validity of the Other's self-conceptions. The challenge facing the churches today is to construct their unique identities and stories in a way that is both dialogical and contextual, liberated from the need to define Jews, or any living Other, in a fixed and functional role. Only when the Other is free to tell his or her story with no imposed demands, or expectations will there be any hope of truly embracing the Other. Until then, post-Holocaust Christianity will continue to cultivate notions of identity in monologue with a chimera, rather than with living souls.

In sum, I have argued that a rejection of otherness is a significant lens that enables us to discern patterns that have heretofore been little examined in post-Holocaust scholarship. This lens elucidates that (1) a rejection of otherness is a significant factor behind the church's languid ethical response towards Jews and other victims during the Holocaust and (2) that a rejection of otherness also animates some fundamental assumptions by which churches and theologians carry out the process of reformation in the aftermath of the Holocaust. These problematic tendencies reveal the intractability of the penchant to assimilate, silence, or reject the Other, if even those toiling in the ranks, dedicated to reforming Christian theology and practice in the shadow of the Holocaust are not immune to these hegemonic propensities. In spite of arduous reforms, the tectonic plate of a rejection of otherness still drifts toward envisioning otherness as a problem to be solved, rather than a gift to be embraced.

After highlighting how a rejection of otherness was a significant factor behind the churches' passive response during the Holocaust, as well as some ways in which an aversion to the Other is still manifested in post-Holocaust reformations, the final two chapters of this work turned toward a more constructive approach. I suggested some characteristics and practices that might begin to equip churches to better resist the manifold forms that a rejection of otherness can take within their own unique contexts. The underlying question I explored was: how might Christian churches begin to authentically live out their calling in the midst of a world deeply riven by a rejection of otherness?

I drew attention to some invaluable theological resources that illumine how identity might be construed in a way that is multifaceted, complex, fluid, and able to

traverse rigid boundaries of identity. I also suggested three significant Christian practices: a posture of embrace, solidarity and augmented boundaries of moral obligation, and the practice of hospitality in a radically inhospitable world. It is hoped that these practices might offer a helpful starting point for congregations seeking to grapple with the issues brought to light here and to illustrate the rich resources within Christian theology for the kind of practical work that must take place. I argued that the constructive task of implementing these practices can only be discerned dialogically and contextually—in response to the question of who is the Other within our own unique historical and cultural context.

In closing, the lens of otherness is not simply an artificially constructed conceptual tool for the purpose of this analysis, but profoundly reflects the reality of the world we live in; a world rich in multiplicity and yet saturated by fear and a rejection of otherness. I have endeavored to illustrate the deleterious potentiality of a rejection of otherness through both a reflection on the Holocaust and by demonstrating some of the manifold ways that a rejection of otherness is manifested in our contemporary context, in hopes of conveying the urgency to constructively challenge the complexities that otherness poses for the Christian churches.

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